

# In These Times

INDEPENDENT NEWS & VIEWS

August 8, 1999

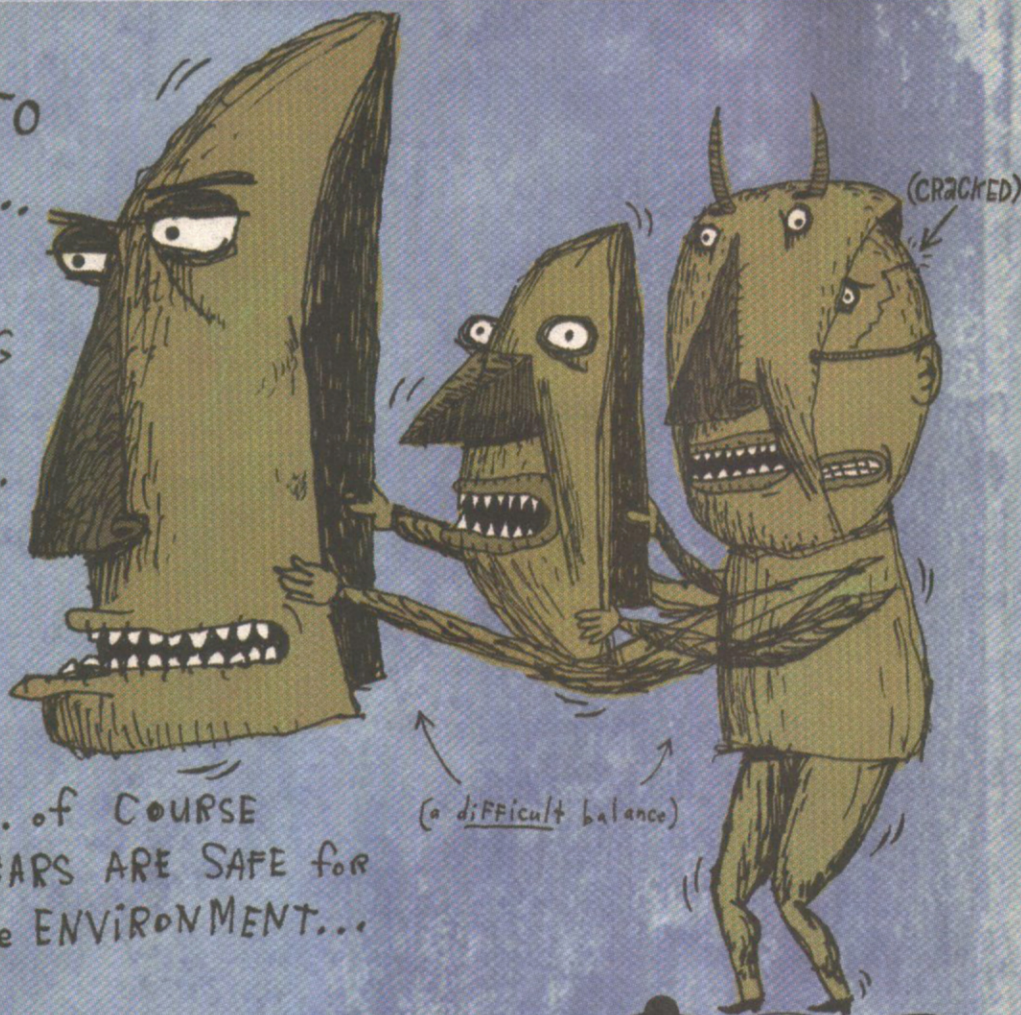
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NOTHING TO  
WORRY ABOUT...

...that  
NUCLEAR TESTING  
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COMMUNITY...

...there is NO  
RADIATION  
LEAKAGE...

...of COURSE  
CARS ARE SAFE for  
the ENVIRONMENT...



## LIES,

AND THE

## DAMN LIES

## ENVIRONMENT

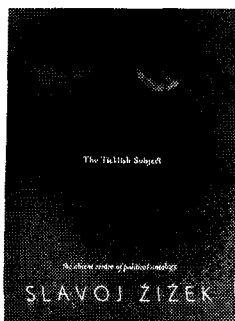
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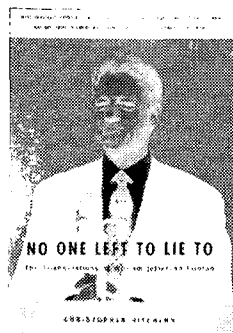
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## 2 Letters

## 3 Editorial

## 4 News

Collateral damage and Colombia dammed.

## 6 Appall-o-Meter By David Futrelle

## 9 Viewpoint By Seth Ackerman

What was the war for?

## 10 The Flanders Files By Laura Flanders

Blinded with science.

## 11 Infernal Combustion

By Jane Holtz Kay

Autos get a free ride.

## 15 Gridlocked

By James B. Goodno

Saving ourselves from sprawl.

## 18 Greenwash Guru

By Bob Burton

Mr. Sandman chases his dream.

## 21 30 Years After

By Jeffrey St. Clair

The legacy of America's largest nuclear test.

## 24 The New Beirut

By Robin Shulman

And some old problems.

## 28 We Are All Utopians

By David Graeber

Believe in an alternative.

## 31 Magic Market

By Bill Boisvert

The last *Temptation* of James B. Twitchell.

## 34 Nowhere USA

By Christopher Becker

Bettina Drew's *Landscape*.

## 38 The Demand for Lifeboats

By Peter Bernstein

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4



15



18



28

Cover by Mara Cluthe

# Letters

## Bathroom Breakthrough

In "The Lexus and the Right to Pee" (June 13), Barbara Ehrenreich cites my book, *Void Where Prohibited: Rest Breaks and the Right to Urinate on Company Time*, in stating that there is no federal right to bathroom breaks. In fact, as a result of the book and two years of discussions with the United Food and Commercial Workers and me, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued an official interpretation on April 6, 1998, that its regulation requiring employers to provide toilets also "requires employers to make toilet facilities available so that employees can use them when they need to do so."

Workers whose employers deny them access to toilets should therefore complain to OSHA. Unfortunately, if OSHA chooses not to enforce the law, the right to pee will remain a mere piece of paper since the federal courts have ruled that workers are not entitled to sue employers to ensure this right.

**Marc Linder**  
University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

## ¿Qué Pasa?

In the article on George W. Bush ("The Great Right Hope," May 30), Russell Contreras says, "Sometimes he even used his gringo Spanish." Where I come from, "gringo Spanish" means inadequate language proficiency. But judging from the news clips that I have

heard, Bush is able to create sentences in the language, not just repeat memorized phrases. As a Spanish-speaker, this puts him above 99 percent of Anglo politicians in the United States. Criticize his politics, but don't underestimate his language ability.

**Lee Hartman**  
Carbondale, Ill.

## By the Numbers

Neil Swanson suggests that Al Gore is misleading people about the extent to which his financial support comes from "the little guy" ("Money Money Money!" May 30). But we see the deception as Swanson's, not the Vice President's. The Gore press release, according to Swanson, merely offered the "impressive statistic that 74 percent of his 45,000 contributors gave \$100 or less." Swanson then continues, "While Gore suggests that the majority of his money came from small donors, quite the opposite is true."

But Gore has suggested nothing of the kind! Gore made the point that 74 percent of his contributors have given \$100 or less. This is an entirely different measure than the one Swanson goes on to emphasize (percentage of money from large contributions) and is arguably the more valid for assessing the breadth of his support from "the little guy." In any event, to impute anything devious in Gore's citing this impressive statistic strikes us as truly devious.

**Edmund and Stephanie Fantino**  
Del Mar, Calif.

## Summer Vacation

We're taking a short two-week break following the publication of this double issue. The next *In These Times* you receive will arrive in one month and be dated August 22.

## Identity Crisis

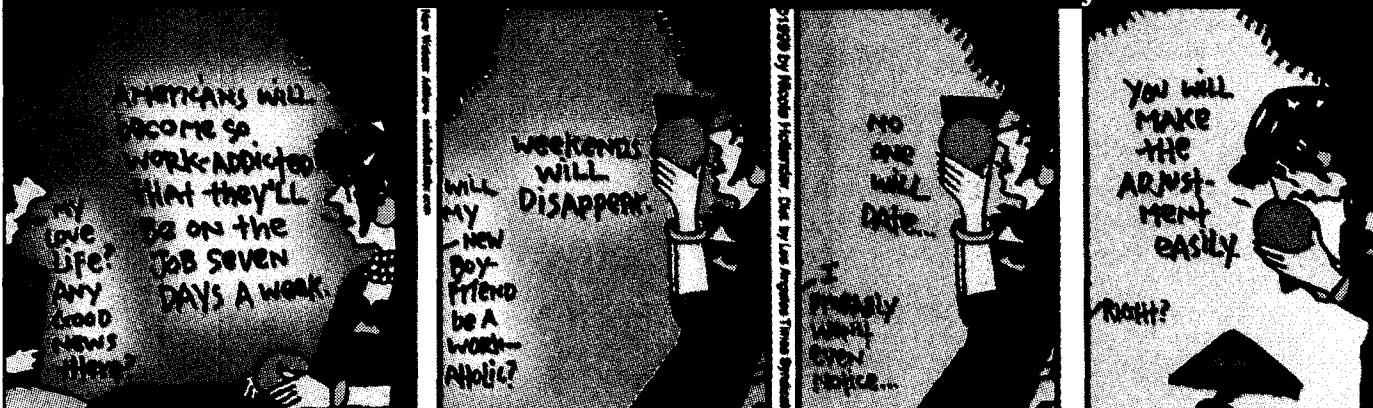
I am a conservative and decided to subscribe to your magazine as an alternative to *The Nation*. Imagine my surprise when I opened my first issue to read "His Place In History" by Christopher Hitchens (May 30). At first I thought he had become a Republican! Then I thought I had become a Wellstone disciple! Eeeeeek!!! Fortunately reason prevailed and the truth became obvious. No matter where one comes from, the good Mr. Clinton has equally impressed us all. Unfortunately, the one bright spot in his administration, Robert Rubin, is leaving. I hope Lawrence Summers can fill his shoes. In any case, I wish Hitchens and your magazine the best for giving me the definitive description of the president.

**Bill Kelly**  
Northfield, Minn.

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SYLVIA



By Nicole Hollander



# Joining Forces

In elite circles, the idea that major social decisions should be left to the market, rather than politics, is flying as high as the stock market—propelled by even greater “irrational exuberance” than Alan Greenspan sees on Wall Street. Yet this free market triumphalism clashes with two broad values of the general public—protecting the environment and promoting social justice. In their own fashion, these deep-seated sentiments reject the logic that the natural environment and human labor should be reduced to commodities for sale.

Although they represent the major challenges to market society (aside from some forces of cultural tradition and religion), these two broad views of the world—and the organizations that give expression to them—often function completely independent of each other. At times they conflict, especially over issues related to economic growth, such as loggers at odds with forest preservationists.

Ultimately, however, labor and environmentalists need their combined forces to win politically, just as they need their combined ideas to create a good society. Environmentalists must become part of the struggle for social justice. And groups fighting for human and worker rights must recognize that better stewardship of the environment is essential for improving lives around the world.

The good news is that these two movements are converging on many fronts, often focused on a common enemy. This spring, for example, environmentalists and labor unions joined forces to nominate two independents to the board of directors of Maxxam Corporation, Charles Hurwitz's poorly managed and predatory corporation that both has locked out Kaiser Aluminum workers and excessively logged redwood forests in California. With backing from church and civil rights groups, labor and environmentalists also continued their attack on Crown Petroleum, which has locked out its workers in Pasadena, Texas, and endangered nearby minority neighborhoods with its dangerous, understaffed refinery.

Sometimes the link between environmental protection and social justice can redefine an issue. In Minneapolis-St. Paul, for example, state Rep. Myron Orfield has put together a coalition of working-class suburbs and the central cities to fight subsidies for highways and sewers that promote environmentally harmful sprawl. At the same time, he has worked for a fairer sharing of tax revenues and more affordable housing in the rich suburbs. Urban sprawl, a hot issue that has even provoked modest proposals from Al Gore, is not just an issue of preserving open lands or reducing highway congestion. It is also an issue of metropolitan inequality and racial division.

In another instance, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (now part of PACE, the Paper, Allied and Chemical Employees) and environmental groups were able

to reach agreement on promoting a “just transition” that would guarantee education, income and jobs to workers displaced by shutting down companies producing chlorine-based, environmentally hazardous products. Workers, then, will not have to pay with their jobs for the common good.

Environmentalists and social justice groups have linked up most prominently in a critique of corporate globalization, including fights against the World Trade Organization and other new global economic accords. Deregulated global markets, the burden of debt or the dictates of the International Monetary Fund pressure many countries to ignore workers rights and permit destructive exploitation of natural resources.

Yet the connections are not always made. Recently a wide range of development, religious, labor and other groups—centered around the global Jubilee 2000 campaign—have made dramatic strides in pressing for debt relief for the 50 or so most heavily indebted, extremely poor countries. Although far from satisfactory, the G-8 conference of rich nations at Cologne, Germany, recently raised its commitment to write off unpayable debt that is eating up poor countries' limited resources and ruining their citizens' lives and environment. Despite the ecological connection, only a few environmental groups, such as Friends of the Earth, have promoted Jubilee 2000.

**Labor and environmentalists represent the two major challenges to market society. They must work together to succeed.**

Meanwhile, on the issue of global warming, the U.S. labor movement and environmentalists have been searching for common ground, including a just transition from a carbon fuels economy. Labor is opposed to the Kyoto agreement to limit greenhouse emissions because it fails to set goals for developing countries. But it's reasonable to expect developing countries to agree to emissions targets only if the advanced countries are willing to help provide the advanced technology that permits carbon dioxide reduction and economic growth. Too often fears about job losses have diverted organized labor from the longer-range view that workers in the United States will benefit if the country can take a leading role in producing clean, efficient technologies needed by both rich and poor countries.

The divisions between the environmental and labor movements continue to make both weaker, while corporate power and the fundamentalist free-marketeers continue to score gains. In the long run, the hope for a renewed popular left depends on both movements challenging the dictatorship of the market. Neither will succeed without the other.

David Moberg



# Collateral Damage

By Tony Wesolowsky

PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC

**D**uring its air war in Yugoslavia, NATO's military might was locked on targets stockpiled with some of the most lethal chemicals known to man. Across Yugoslavia, fuel depots, oil refineries and chemical factories were routinely bombed, trying to bring Slobodan Milosevic to heel. But the environmental consequences of bombing certainly didn't factor into the equation. As a result, NATO's air campaign unleashed a chain of ecological disasters, the aftermath of which will be felt for generations.

Although it's too early for comprehensive reports on the bombings' environmental effects, there is some alarming evidence of serious damage. Acid rain in Romania and hundreds of dead fish bobbing in oil slicks stretching up to 10 miles across the Danube River are the most obvious telltale signs.

The sprawling petrochemical plant at Pancevo, just 10 miles northeast of Belgrade, served as one of NATO's favorite targets; during 78 days of bombing, NATO missiles hit Pancevo some 15 times. Thick plumes of toxins hovered over the smoldering industrial site, which included fertilizer factories and an oil refinery. Among the most lethal substances handled at the plant was vinyl chloride, which is known to cause cancer, as well as damage to the liver and kidneys. Many Serbs made sick by the noxious fumes were instructed by authorities to breathe through scarves soaked in sodium bicarbonate.

While among the most destructive, the assault on Pancevo was not unique. Environmentalists are especially worried about the Danube, Europe's main waterway. Pancevo, oil behemoth Novi Sad and other industrial sites

NATO bombed sit along the river, which flows through 10 countries and supplies 10 million people with drinking water. Four countries along the river—Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Ukraine—are downstream of Yugoslavia.

At a May conference of European scientists and environmentalists in Athens, Philip Weller of the World Wide Fund for Nature, the international arm of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), warned that the situation was dire downstream of Yugoslavia, where a toxic brew of oil, chlorine monomers and mercury has taken over the Danube



Residents of Novi Sad were evacuated when NATO bombed an oil refinery.

and threatens the Black Sea. "Only immediate measures to stop the downstream flow of pollution," he said, "will prevent an ecological catastrophe from following the humanitarian one."

A study of the Danube by the Romanian environmental ministry showed concentrations of copper, lead, chromium and cadmium had doubled over three days in April. These chemicals build up in body fat, causing birth and genetic defects and infertility. Questions remain about how much of this lethal stew was trapped by the 66-mile-long hydroelectric dam that supplies Yugoslavia and Romania with power.

The first major oil slick on the Danube reached Bulgaria on April 7 after the bombing of the refinery at Pancevo. Weller says that 20,000 tons of crude also gushed into the Danube after NATO bombed Pancevo and Novi Sad one day before the peace deal was signed. During the NATO campaign, Bulgaria periodically shut down groundwater reserves along a 300-mile stretch of the Danube to protect drinking supplies from contamination. After a wet winter and spring, river levels fell this summer, leaving behind oil and other toxins on the shore that are leaching into the soil.

The U.N. Environmental Program and the U.N. Center for Human Settlements have created a special task force to assess the ecological impact of the conflict on the Balkans. Meanwhile,

the governments of Romania and Bulgaria are working with the WWF to acquire funds and specialized equipment that will monitor toxins in the Danube. "The first step must be an independent and verifiable assessment of the situation," Weller says. "Without that, it's impossible to know the appropriate action to take."

Tracking oil slicks, however, may prove to be a more urgent concern, though many officials won't admit it. John Large, a

London-based nuclear safety consultant, told Scotland's *Sunday Herald* that Bulgaria's Kozloduy nuclear power plant, which sits on the Danube 90 miles south of the Yugoslavian border, is in danger of a Chernobyl-like accident from the spills. He warned that the oil could jam machines that pump water from the river to cool the reactors.

The same waters flowing in the 1,700-mile Danube also support some of Europe's last surviving and richest wetlands, including its vast delta. Large flocks of birds that would normally roost in Serbia are taking refuge in Macedonia, according to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.



The Guardian reported that fires caused by the bombings devastated protected forest habitats across the country. "Serbia's wetlands are some of the very best," says Alexandra Chaini of the Athens branch of the WWF. "The bombings destroyed a whole web of life."

And grazing livestock, such as cattle, goats and sheep, may be poisoned after ingesting small aluminum shards dropped by NATO warplanes to confuse radar, according to reports from Friends of the Earth in Greece.

Especially troubling was NATO's use of armor-penetrating depleted uranium (DU) weapons. DU, the waste left over from the enrichment of uranium, is extremely dense—1.7 times more dense than lead. On impact, DU turns to dust—a speck lodged in a lung can cause cancer. A 1991 report by the U.S. Nuclear Defense Agency found that radiation from fragments and intact DU rounds pose a "serious health threat." First used on a large-scale during the Gulf War, DU has been linked to Gulf War Syndrome as well as high levels of stillbirths, birth defects and leukemia among Iraqi children.

No one knows exactly where and how much of this lethal dust is now sprinkled across Yugoslavia. The Kosovars returning home are about to find out. ■

Tony Wesolowsky is a journalist covering Eastern Europe. He is based in Prague.

# Much Ado About Nothing

By Fred Weir

Moscow

**A**fter a nasty Cold War-style scare over NATO's war in Yugoslavia, relations between Russia and the West appeared to return quickly to a cuddly post-communist partnership. Russian president Boris Yeltsin, arriving in Cologne, Germany, on June 20 for a summit of the Group of Eight leading industrial countries, greeted Bill Clinton like a long lost brother, bear-hugged German Chancellor Gerhard Shroeder, arm-wrestled playfully with Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien, and declared it time "to put our quarrels behind us."

The talk at the one-day meeting centered almost exclusively on restarting nuclear arms control, rescheduling Russia's debt and reviving its economic reforms. "This entire difficulty in Kosovo has been a great test for the U.S.-Russian relationship," Clinton told a Russian TV audience after the summit. "But it's a test I believe both countries have passed."

Back in Russia, things don't look so simple. Just one day after the summit ended, Russia's armed forces commenced the biggest military exercise of the post-Soviet era, turning the western region of the country—and neighboring Belarus—

into a stage for air, land and sea maneuvers dubbed "West '99." For six days, Russia's long-neglected and underfunded forces mobilized to repel a hypothetical NATO invasion from the Arctic to the Black Sea. "The war in Yugoslavia has given our military leaders much more clout," says Valery Fyodorov, an analyst at the independent Center for Political Trends. "Before the crisis there was no consensus on who was Russia's potential enemy or if we even had one. Now everyone agrees the threat comes from NATO."

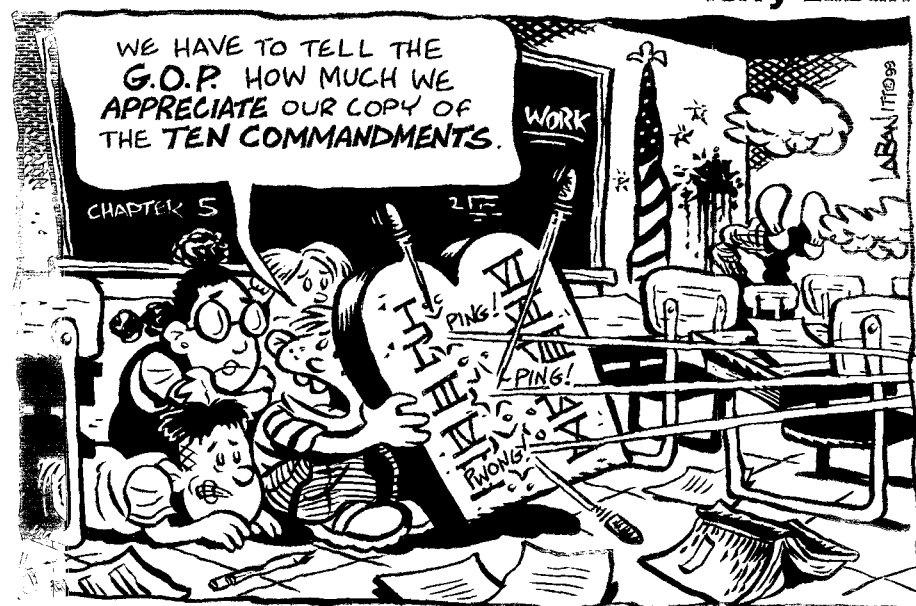
Though Moscow played a key role in brokering the deal that ended NATO's 11-week air war against Yugoslavia, Russians feel they were brusquely shouldered aside when it came to framing the peace. "NATO entered Kosovo like a victorious army, completely forgetting that it was a U.N. mandate facilitated by Russia that saved them from having to actually fight a long and bloody ground war," says Nikolai Zyubov, an independent political analyst. "They figured that having Russians as partners in the peace-keeping force would be a nuisance, so they planned to just keep us out."

Whatever the truth of that allegation, there is no doubt Western leaders were deeply chagrined when a small contingent of Russian soldiers bolted from their peacekeeping duties in nearby Bosnia and arrived in Pristina ahead of NATO troops. It was a brilliant propaganda coup—engineered by Moscow's defense ministry—though it remains disturbingly unclear whether Yeltsin signed off on it before or after the fact.

The dash to Kosovo underscored Russia's continuing aspiration to be treated as an equal player on the European stage. Yeltsin demanded Russia be given its own occupation sector, arguing that the troubled region's Serbian minority would not trust NATO forces to protect them from the vengeance of returning Albanian refugees. "There is strong logic in Moscow's position," Zyubov says. "If the Western goal in Kosovo was to protect multi-ethnic democracy in that region

*Continued on page 6*

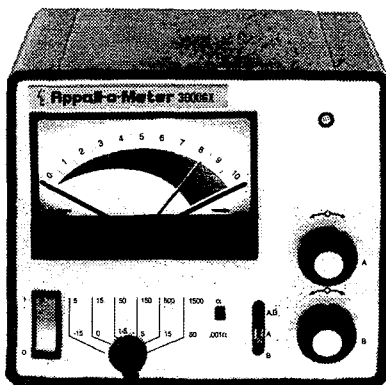
Terry LaBan





# Appall-o-Meter

By David Futrelle



## Deep Doo Doo 9.2

Pompeii was buried under an avalanche of lava. Tegucigalpa, Honduras, may soon find itself under a pile of something even more unpleasant. The city, home to more than a million residents, was hit hard by Hurricane Mitch last fall. As a result of the damage the hurricane did to its sewage system, Tegucigalpa now lives in fear of massive explosions caused by tons of backed-up, ah, waste. "We are racing against time to unblock the pipes before winter comes and the pipes and manholes overflow or explode," the head of the Honduran sewer system recently told the press. "There are tanks that are full of fecal matter and that could explode because of the gases being produced and the pressure of new fluids." Pretty crappy indeed.

## Mandatory Manners 8.3

Students in Louisiana must treat their teachers with new respect—lest they run afoul of a law just passed by the state legislature demanding that teachers and other school employees be addressed as "Sir" or "Ma'am." Bill sponsor Dan Cravins, a Democratic state senator, says the new law will lead to better behavior on the part of students and cut back on youth violence. After all, he says, a similar program has worked wonders with prison inmates in the state pen. "I've seen how polite and well-mannered the young inmates are," Cravins recently told the press. "If we can teach them that in prison, we can teach them in schools."

## Brand Name 5.3

Many athletes these days lend their name to a product or put its logo on their shirt. Now one Australian rules footballer actually has replaced his name with that of a product he's endorsing, Reuters reports. No, he's not changing his name to Nike. Gary Hocking, captain of the Geelong Cats, an Australian rules football team, legally changed his name to "Whiskas" for a week. "It is just a light-hearted thing from a commercial point of view that will help the club get out of strife," the artist-temporarily-known-as-Whiskas explained. "I'm probably

going to cop a little bit of flak, but I see it as a good thing for the footy club and Whiskas."

## Born Again Biker Battle 6.2

All is not well among God's Harley-riding children. The Sons of God Motorcycle Club Ministry is suing another evangelists-on-bikes organization known, perhaps not coincidentally, as the Chosen Sons of God Motorcycle Club Ministries, the *Chicago Tribune* reports. The Sons claim that the Chosen Sons, headed by former unchosen Son



TERRY LABAN

"Mountain Bill" Hodge, have stolen their identity by adopting a name and logo miraculously similar to their own. The laws of man will decide the court case; the bikers presumably will have to explain the dispute to a higher authority as well.

Continued from page 5

and to lay the foundations for a new, inclusive European security system, then they should give Russia a major role in the Kosovo peacekeeping force."

Instead, the outcome drove home post-Soviet Russia's vastly diminished status. The tiny band of Russian paratroopers camped at Pristina airport waited in vain for reinforcements from the motherland: NATO persuaded all the surrounding countries to close their airspace to Russian planes. At the Cologne summit, Russia quietly agreed to a deal in which about 3,500 of its troops would patrol sectors of Kosovo firmly under control of leading NATO members. "Moscow can't afford the \$150 million or so that it would cost to maintain an independent force there anyway," says Viktor Kremeniuk, a political expert at the Institute of

Canada-U.S.A. Studies in Moscow. "So we have to beg from NATO."

In Cologne, Yeltsin let his minions deal with the humiliating Kosovo climb-down and spent his time talking with Clinton about the future of arms control. The two decided to get talks on START III, which aims to cut the nuclear arsenals of Russia and the United States by half, back on track by this fall. Yeltsin also broke a Russian vow never to reopen the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the keystone of Cold War arms control, and told Clinton that Moscow is now willing to talk about it. "There is a big effort on both sides to show everything is OK now," says Andrei Piontkovsky, director of the liberal Center for Strategic Studies. "Clinton's policy on Russia has been a historic failure, so he needs some kind of results to stave off Republican criticism in next year's

elections. Yeltsin needs to pretend he's still a big power player."

Behind the scenes, the Russian delegation pleaded for Western forgiveness of \$66 billion in Soviet-era debt. Moscow is faced with \$17.5 billion in debt servicing charges this year alone, and cannot afford to pay even a fraction of it. Default is imminent.

Without major initiatives to address the country's economic crisis, and a new European security deal that gives Russia an equal place at the table, the growing alienation of Russia will not be reversed. "The summit was theater meant to distract from the accumulating problems," Kremeniuk says. "Arms control is good, but it's not the important issue it was during the Cold War. As for debt relief, who cares whether they give it or not? Everyone knows Russia is too far gone to pay anyway." ■



# Oregon's Eco-Crackdown

By Jeffrey St. Clair

SALEM, ORE.

**U**nder legislation now speeding through the Oregon general assembly, some of the most effective and media-savvy forms of environmental protest would be outlawed. One bill, drafted by Sen. Bill Fisher of Roseburg, would make it a felony for environmentalists to stage protests within a quarter mile of a logging site. Fisher's bill shrewdly defines the perimeter of the area to include all access roads to the logging site, effectively banning protests within miles of actual clearcutting.

The bill recently passed the Oregon state Senate in an unanimous vote and now awaits action in the House. The sanctions for violating the terms of the proposed law are stiff, including up to five years in jail and a \$100,000 fine. A companion bill would extend similar penalties for protests at mines and agricultural operations.

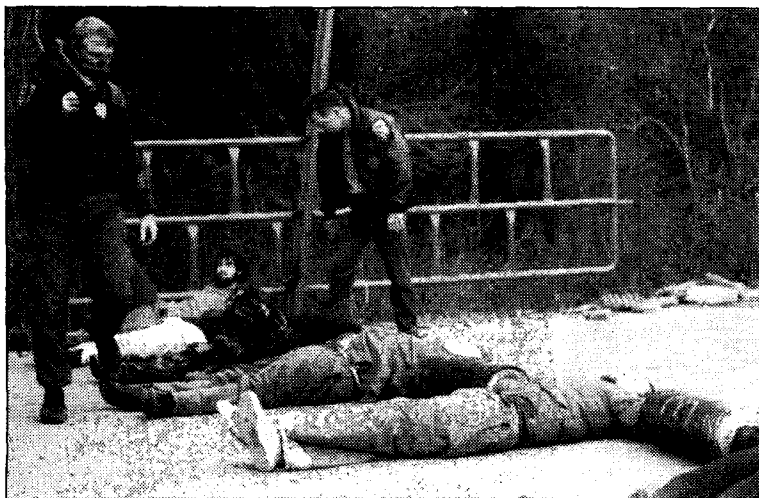
The legislation, denounced as an assault on civil liberties by environmental groups such as Earth First!, has been pushed by anti-green wise-use organizations and logging companies. "I felt something had to be done to combat what I consider acts of eco-terrorism," Fisher says. "The problems we've had with protesting when they have taken the form of blocking [logging] roads is something that needs to be stopped. I just think that a lot of us are

very disgusted with the fact that some people can demonstrate and there's no judgment against them and no follow through."

Fisher's bill, which would create the crime of "unlawful presence," is aimed at stopping protests such as tree sitting and road blockades that have effectively delayed, and sometimes halted, logging in ancient forests. One recent blockade at Warner Creek in Oregon's Willamette National Forest lasted for more than 16 months. In some cases, tree sitters, when environmentalists climb more than 150 feet up in trees slated for cutting, have succeeded in protecting forest groves until federal courts had a chance to rule on lawsuits. In Northern California, Julia "Butterfly" Hill has been perched in a redwood tree on lands owned by Houston-based conglomerate Maxxam for more than a year.

Fisher's bill is modeled on an Idaho law that has landed dozens of environmentalists behind bars. But Fisher and other pro-industry legislators want to go even further. He also has prepared legislation that would target people who contribute to environmental organizations that engage in acts of civil disobedience. Fisher admits there may be a few "constitutional hang-ups" with the bill. "I don't have a legal background on these things," he says. ■

Under a new law being considered in Oregon, protesters like these could face severe penalties.



JOHN G. MABANGLO/APP

## Etc.

### A Modest Proposal

President Clinton has decided, in his words, "to put a human face on the global economy." During his six-day trip to Europe in June, Clinton endorsed the International Labor Organization's (ILO) treaty to ban the most abusive forms of child labor—including pornography, prostitution and working with toxic substances. Clinton also issued an executive order to prohibit government agencies from buying products made with forced child labor.

The international child labor treaty is merely a gesture. It would not require sanctions against countries that utilize child labor, but would simply publicize known abuses. The treaty also has failed to garner a total ban on child soldiers—thanks to the U.S. government. According to Human Rights Watch, the United States pressured the ILO to continue to allow voluntary enlistment of child soldiers. The U.S. military recruits a small number of minors with parental consent.

### Crack Attack

Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) has introduced a bill to eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for possession of crack cocaine. The bill cites mounds of statistics showing that mandatory minimum sentencing exacerbates racism in the judicial system. Ninety-six percent of crack cocaine defendants are African-American or Hispanic, and only 5 percent of defendants are high-level dealers. On average, first-time crack offenders serve longer sentences than those convicted of rape or weapons' possession.

According to the *Progressive Review*, Supreme Court Justices Stephen Breyer and Anthony Kennedy and Chief Justice William Rehnquist do not support the mandatory minimum sentencing system.

### The Madness of King George

With a wink and a nod to the NRA cash cows, the GOP's anointed one, Texas Gov. George W. Bush, signed a bill on June 18 making it illegal for cities in Texas to sue gun manufacturers. Bush flack Linda Edwards told the *New York Times* that gun lawsuits are "frivolous." Texas is the fourteenth state to make gun suits illegal.

Kristin Kolb

# Paradise Lost

By Steve Dudley

BOGOTA, COLOMBIA

Colombia's Alto Sinu valley is a stunning sight. Its jungle reaches from a mountain range to a fertile coastal plain connecting it with the Atlantic coast. The valley itself is split by a series of powerful rivers that also form the home of the Embera Katio indigenous community.

The Embera have been living in the area for centuries. But new neighbors have appeared recently: small families of loggers who sell the precious wood from the area to furniture makers, left-wing guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries and Urrea, a giant 340-megawatt hydroelectric plant. The Embera have struggled with all these forces, but their most formidable threat is Urrea.

Urrea has harnessed the Sinu River, channeling it through tunnels into its generators. Its massive dam stretches 400 feet across the entire length of the valley and towers 500 feet above the valley floor. Stacks of sandbags are neatly lining the backside of the dam until the government gives the go-ahead to open the floodgates and create a vast reservoir.

The Embera say the reservoir will flood their community and destroy the fertility of the land where they cultivate corn and bananas. The dam also has threatened the river's fish supply, since the tunnels make it impossible for them to swim upstream and spawn. "We have been struggling so that the construction of Urrea does not finish off our people and our culture," says Embera leader Kimy Pernia.

Environmentalists are also concerned. The dam will flood 18,000 acres, destroying thousands of trees, and restrict sediment from moving downstream where it fertilizes the coastal plain. Stagnant water in the reservoir could increase mosquitoes

and other parasites that bring disease.

The project has been controversial since its inception. After Colombia experienced a series of blackouts in 1992, the government pushed Urrea forward without consulting the local population. Scandinavian and Canadian banks lent more than \$700 million to the financially strapped government. The loans gave the project a momentum difficult to stop. The Embera organized protests and eventually sued to halt construction of the plant. The project was suspended in August 1998 until an agreement could be reached.

It was also in August last year that the killings began. Three Embera leaders

applied for political asylum with the Spanish government. The Embera have since dropped their request, but the situation requires many to remain in hiding.

Other indigenous leaders have fled the country because of conflicts over energy projects. The U'wa in northeastern Colombia have threatened to commit collective suicide if the government allows Occidental Petroleum Company to drill for oil on their land. Their struggle attracted international attention when three environmentalists—U.S. citizens Terence Freitas, Ingrid Washinawatok and Lahe'ena'e Gay—were killed by guerrillas after visiting the community in March. U'wa leader Roberto Cobardia was granted political asylum in April. Cobardia had received threats from both paramilitaries and guerrillas.

A commission of government, academic and U'wa representatives are expected to issue a decision on the oil project this month. The Embera case is also coming to a close. By court order, the community and the plant have until Sept. 2 to negotiate a compromise. If not, the government's Environmental Ministry will most likely rule in favor of starting up the generator and flooding the valley.

Cases like this are not uncommon in Colombia. Fifty-eight million acres are on Indian reserves—one fourth of the country. Forty-four million acres of this land is in the Amazon, where most of the country's potential energy resources are found. With 19.5 percent unemployment, crippling foreign debt and a contracting economy, the

government is in a bind. "If we were Denmark and had their resources," says Catalina Ortiz, a spokeswoman for the Energy Ministry, "I would love to say, 'I hope they don't fill it up because it might have an environmental impact.' But can we afford to throw millions of dollars down the drain? I don't know." ■

Steve Dudley is a reporter in Bogota. He has written for *The Nation*, *NACLA* and *The Progressive*.



Terence Freitas (right) was murdered after he visited the U'wa.

have been assassinated by right-wing paramilitaries that some claim are connected to the electricity plant. Others say they are allied with large landowners and cattle ranchers who will greatly benefit from the dam because it will eliminate the annual flooding of their downstream property.

The violence has caused several Embera leaders to flee to Bogota. In a desperate plea to draw attention to their case, in April the entire community



# What Was the War For?

**P**resident Clinton declared that NATO's air war won a "victory for a safer world, for our democratic values and for a stronger America." His boasts were echoed in the media, including a *New York Times* editorial that claimed the peace settlement represents "a victory for the principles of democracy and human rights."

The air war destroyed Yugoslavia's economy and infrastructure. The NATO bombing and Serb burning left Kosovo a ruined landscape. Since the war began, thousands of Kosovar-Albanians have been massacred by Serb forces and 750,000 fled the province. An estimated 1,500 Serbian civilians and thousands of soldiers have been killed by NATO bombs.

For what? The peace plan drawn up by NATO and accepted by Yugoslavia on June 3 looks remarkably similar to what the Serbs themselves were proposing weeks before NATO bombing began.

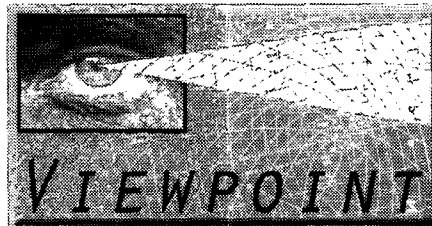
The new plan specifies a Kosovo peace-keeping force "under U.N. auspices." At the Rambouillet peace talks, the Serbs offered precisely that. Agence France Presse reported on Feb. 20 that the head of the Serb delegation had "insisted that the peacekeepers answer to a non-military body such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe ... or the United Nations."

In addition to NATO troops, the new plan calls for a contingent of Russian soldiers in Kosovo. On Feb. 23, the *New York Times* reported that Milosevic's chief negotiator at Rambouillet said that "the Serbs are ready to discuss 'an international presence in Kosovo' to carry out political arrangements of any agreement. And other Serbs have floated ideas that include leavening Western forces with lots of Russians."

So why did NATO bomb?

Less than 24 hours before the deadline ending the February talks at Rambouillet, U.S. negotiators handed the parties a totally new Kosovo plan written by State Department lawyers. The document stipulated that NATO troops would have unimpeded access throughout all of Yugoslavia, not just Kosovo. NATO

would administer Kosovo's new political system, take control of all local broadcast media and prepare for a referendum on Kosovo's independence after three years. This provision contradicted the U.S. negotiators' earlier promise that Kosovo would remain part of Yugoslavia.



The Serbs said they would be willing to sign onto the document's political section, but wanted to negotiate on the military portion. On March 13, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright ruled that out, saying, "They can't pick and choose." The Serbs were given an ultimatum: sign the document as it was—or be bombed.

The State Department's plan appears to have been intentionally crafted to provoke a rejection from the Serbs.

George Kenney, a former State Department Yugoslavia specialist, reported in *The Nation* that a high-level U.S. official told reporters at Rambouillet that officials had " 'deliberately set the bar higher than the Serbs could accept.' The Serbs needed, according to the official, a little bombing to see reason." Jim Jatras, a senior foreign policy aide to Senate Republicans, independently corroborated Kenney's account in a May 18 speech at the Cato Institute.

The new agreement, contains no mention of a referendum. The provision for NATO troops throughout Yugoslavia is gone. And Kosovo's political process will no longer be overseen by NATO, but by the United Nations.

Even the one element of the plan that the Serbs never openly accepted at Rambouillet—NATO-commanded troops in Kosovo—might well have been agreed to if the United States been

willing to negotiate. A senior U.S. official told *Newsweek* that, just before Rambouillet, "We had gotten intelligence reports that suggested the Serbs might be open to the possibility of NATO troops. But those reports simply disappeared as Rambouillet became a shambles."

The United States apparently never intended to reach a peaceful settlement in Kosovo. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States has wanted desperately to keep the NATO alliance going even though it had lost its original purpose. As a leaked 1992 Pentagon planning document asserted, "It is of fundamental importance to preserve NATO as the primary instrument of Western defense and security, as well as the channel for U.S. influence and participation in European security affairs."

Without a Soviet threat, the United States had to search out other uses for the alliance. As a White House foreign policy adviser told the *Washington Post* on the eve of the bombing: "There are massive

**The peace plan looks remarkably like what the Serbs were proposing—weeks before NATO bombing began.**

blood baths all over the world and we're not intervening in them. This one is in the heart of Europe. I'd argue that the alliance itself is at risk because if it's unable to address a major threat within Europe, it really loses its reason for being."

A senior NATO official recently told the *New York Times*: "Organizations seek out action. They need to do things. That's why NATO needs the Balkans as such as the Balkans need NATO. The Balkans is one security issue that NATO can actually do something about. We talked about dealing with drugs, terrorism, proliferation and the mafia, but the truth is there is not much we can really do about them. The thing about the Balkans is that what NATO has to offer is exactly what they need."

But what the Balkans needed was genuine diplomacy, not NATO. ■

# Blinded With Science

**T**here's a battle going on between pharmaceutical giants, eager to hook healthy women on breast cancer "prevention" drugs. At stake for the corporations is a huge market of women scared of cancer. For millions of healthy women considering preventive medication, what's at stake may be their health. In a world where science is driven by profit-seeking businesses, consumers need the media to sort out truth from fiction. But all too often journalists fail to separate the two.

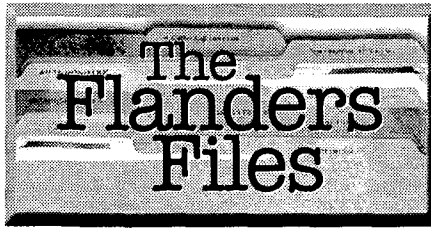
To shorten a lengthy story: In May, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) publicized a study to compare two drugs that have showed some potential in reducing breast cancer risk in healthy women. The study of tamoxifen and raloxifene, or STAR trial, will last five years—but the contest to win consumer confidence is on now.

Tamoxifen, made by the British-based conglomerate Astra Zeneca, is known to be effective for treating breast cancer and reducing the risk of recurrence in some women with the disease. Last April, the Food and Drug Administration approved tamoxifen (marketed under the brand name Nolvadex) for use by healthy women, after an abbreviated study showed it reduced the incidence of breast cancer among some women at high risk for the disease. The NCI issued a euphoric press release, triggering news media excitement about a breast cancer "prevention pill." The full results of the study weren't released for five months.

To put it mildly, that short study had serious shortcomings. While 45 percent fewer women taking tamoxifen developed invasive breast cancer than those given a placebo, the actual number of cancers—154 (2.3 percent) on the placebo and 85 (1.3 percent) on tamoxifen—were small. The trial proved nothing about the drug's long-term effects, ending after only four years, one year before women on tamoxifen historically have showed increased risk of uterine cancer. Moreover, the results say almost nothing about the drug's effect on women who aren't white. Only 3 percent of the

trial's participants were African-American, Asian-American or Latina.

From a profit perspective, the trial report was great stuff. The folks at Zeneca—who provided all the drugs for the trial—saw their stock price rise 10 points the day the NCI report was



released. The dubious data didn't stop reporters, led by the *New York Times'* Gina Kolata, from reporting extensively on the tamoxifen "breakthrough." (Meanwhile, the *Times* entirely failed to cover the preliminary results of two European trials that contradicted the NCI's findings on tamoxifen.)

Riding the wave of positive coverage, Astra Zeneca kicked off an ad campaign encouraging healthy women to assess their breast cancer risk, then contact the company for information about Nolvadex (in the TV ads, the drug's not named). Print ads promise frightened women, "There is something you can do." The advertisements don't mention that tamoxifen causes strokes and is a known carcinogen, with serious potential side effects—including blood clots, eye damage, depression, irritability, vaginal dryness, hot flashes, memory loss and weight gain.

Indiana-based Eli Lilly is pushing its own "prevention pill." Just as Zeneca trumpeted the tamoxifen study long before its official release, so Eli Lilly is pre-promoting research on raloxifene. Under the brand name Evista, the FDA OK'd raloxifene in 1997 for treating osteoporosis in post-menopausal women. Compared to estrogen, the most widely used treatment for osteo-

porosis, raloxifene seems not to increase the risk of breast cancer. So now Eli Lilly wants its drug approved for breast cancer "prevention" too.

On June 16, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published the preliminary results of a study on raloxifene's effects on post-menopausal women. Paid for by Eli Lilly and conducted by a team that included several paid consultants and speakers for the company, the three-year study of 7,705 women (96 percent of them white) found a 76 percent lower risk of breast cancer among those taking raloxifene compared with those given a placebo. As the study's authors reported, "To prevent one case of breast cancer, 126 women would need to be treated." That's a lot of healthy women taking raloxifene—a drug known to increase risks of blood clots—daily for three years, for a relatively minimal benefit. Nonetheless, the headline on The Associated Press wire report declared, "Estrogen Substitute Lowers Cancer Risk."

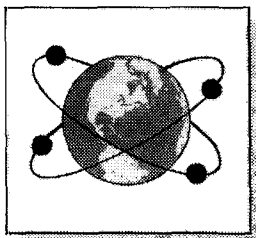
**When science is driven by profit-seeking business, drug consumers need accurate reporting. They don't get it.**

"It's standard practice for any drug manufacturing company to look for new uses for their medicines once they are on the market," protests Dr. Bert Spilker, a senior vice president of PHARMA, the drug manufacturers trade association. Under current law, there's nothing stopping companies from using press releases and commercials to push interim results on already existing drugs. But without responsible news coverage, that promotional push can tempt healthy women to try risky medications.

Most media rely on pharmaceutical advertising dollars and underwriting. Is that why so many headlines inflate the corporations' claims for free?

For the record: There's no pill to save women from breast cancer. For an antidote to the coverage, try Breast Cancer Action's excellent newsletter, which can be found at [www.bcaction.org](http://www.bcaction.org). ■





# Infernal Combustion

***When it comes to global warming, autos get a free ride***

***By Jane Holtz Kay***

**Y**ou don't need a weatherman to tell you that the whole earth has become the scorched earth. And you don't need a climate course to teach you that the temperature has become hot news. In the hottest decade of the millennium, "severe weather alerts" are as constant as the calendar.

It started last winter with the headlines: "South Gets White Christmas and Loses Power" and "California Farmers Hope to Salvage Some Citrus." It continued with blizzards in the Midwest, tornados in Florida, and hot-to-warm climate quick steps in New England. By late spring, the Los Angeles cool and the East Coast steam had reversed the natural order of the continent.

But if weather scares have chilled us out and heated our consciousness, there is one thing that the fluctuating thermometer and rising tides don't record. And that's the complicity of the car. Whatever the assessment of the damage of the capricious climate, the political and financial barometers have yet to register the largest single contributor to global warming.



**I**s your current car too closely related to the fossil fuel it burns?" asks an advertisement for a luxury automobile. You bet it is. Our stock of motor vehicles is not only related to rising temperatures and erratic weather but a parent of the problem. In just one example, the Atmosphere Alliance has blamed a sharp jump of 3.4 percent in U.S. emissions—more than the total of most nations—

.....  
Americans killed by motor vehicles, 1998: 41,480 . . . Americans killed in the Korean War, 1950-1953:

## Green Machines?

**D**eer frolic in the pictures of General Motors' "Family Tree of Next Generation Vehicles," a promotional kit touting the variety of engines for the upcoming "green fleet." Advanced batteries, fuel cells, compressed natural gas and various "hybrids" with traditional internal combustion fill the list. The ballyhoo is not exclusively GM's, of course. Within months after Honda's LEV Accord advertisement appeared with the image of a Mr. Clean musclemán declaring "you are what you drive," the Justice Department and the EPA fined the company \$12.6 million for faking clean air test results.

How green are these machines, then? While Washington ignores the car's role in global warming, the auto

companies' lone concession is to offer these electric or hybrid cars—a self-serving gesture, to say the least. Certainly, an electric vehicle lessens air pollution, and could stop our escalating asthma rates as well as raise environmental consciousness. In Germany, for example, a pilot project will soon give the post office the world's largest electric fleet, 15,000 zinc-air-battery-powered vehicles each with a 260-mile range, 75 mph cruising speed and a 7-minute recharge. Soon, similar cars may be available to meet the mandate of California (and increasingly more states) that 10 percent of all vehicles be emission-free in 2003.

Sheila Lynch, of the Northeast Alternative Vehicles Consortium,

touts the Prius, Toyota's hybrid that was on tour last spring. The Prius blends the electric vehicle with a more efficient (and more marketable) internal combustion machine to cut down on two ills: dirty air and global warming. It also would meet Kyoto standards. "It is by no means a dream machine," however, notes Jason Mark, senior transportation analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists in California. "The question is what will they actually do."

For all they save in tailpipe emissions, these new prototypes do not address the broader range of climate change-inducing, highway-based consumption. They are high-tech, superficial fixes. And auto manufacturers recently added environmental

insult to climate injury: To toe the Kyoto line of reduction, they will create more diesel engines—dirty diesels that obey the letter of the anti-carbon dioxide treaty but still contribute mightily—and carcinogenically—to air pollution.

Green-tinted or not, the car remains the heavy. The asphalt laid for the infrastructure of sprawl it breeds encourages the wasteful trashing of older urban or suburban centers in favor of climate-controlled fringe ones, sending our wheels spinning on yet more petroleum. In the end, the making, running and polluting of these machines still encourage the energy loss, social malaise, land consumption and environmental despair that confound all attempts at conservation.

J.H.K.

on one automoted energy hog, the sport-utility vehicle.

But SUVs on steroids are just the newest phase of U.S. auto-dependency. Clock the minutes: Every second the nation's 200 million motor vehicles travel 60,000 miles, use 3,000 gallons of petroleum products and add 60,000 pounds of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere—that's two-thirds of U.S. carbon dioxide emissions.

The surprise is that despite the motor vehicle's role in making the weather gyrate like a Dow Jones graph, the total cost of America's auto-dependency remains a dirty but hidden secret. The roads we build to serve the car, the fuel we extract, the industrial energy consumed in producing 15 million motor

vehicles a year are enormous—and largely unrecorded. U.S. cars and trucks carry three-quarters of a trillion dollars in hidden costs. Often lacking a dollar sign, their tally ranges

from parking facilities to police protection; from registry operations to uncompensated accidents. Cars bought on the installment plan drive up consumer debt by 40 percent, making the General Motors Acceptance Corporation the largest consumer finance institution in the world. And

we haven't even calculated the environmental cost of global warming in repairing the damage from floods and fires.

How do we right this equation? We need to acknowledge the exactions of our auto-based existence. The love affair with

***There is one thing  
the fluctuating  
thermometer doesn't  
record ...***

36,914 ... Rank of motor vehicle crashes as cause of death for Americans aged 6 to 27: 1 ... Estimated



the motor vehicle that festoons our policy like a GM hood ornament comes at a steep price, personally, socially and environmentally.

Beyond the \$93 billion a year that local, state and national governments spend on roads, we must tally other expenditures, from the 41,500 lives lost annually in car accidents to the automobiles and auto parts that account for two-thirds of our trade deficit with Japan. From 8 billion hours a year stuck in traffic to the \$100 billion a year spent on the military budget defending our Middle East oil supply, the visible and invisible costs of the car mount. Count, too, the rising cost of that oil extraction as we labor to clean or discover new reserves, which are predicted to dwindle and become pricier on their way to exhaustion.

Beyond building and running our cars, there is the environmental and financial toll of car-bred sprawl. The land bulldozed into asphalt is a lost opportunity cost. The wetlands and farmland paved (two million arable acres a year), the open space or city split by an arterial highway, or the hilltop sprouting the four-leaf clover interstate is, to say the least, a minus.

Then there are the other invisible losses. The price of car-bred infrastructure subsidized to take us to the sprawling edges demands, in turn, an evermore pricey and energy-squandering infrastructure of electricity, cable and sewage lines at the end of the road. Consider that by laying asphalt for the automobile, we give over more than half our cities to roads and parking lots. (Note how each automobile

## DRIVE TO WORK



## WORK TO DRIVE

demands seven spaces to move and park—one at home, one at work, one at the mall and four for the road network.) Chart our subsidies for such incidentals as parking: for one, the 85 million employees given free spaces whose real estate is worth an average of \$1,000 apiece. This amounts to an \$85 billion lure—and \$85 billion denied to non-drivers. No other country carries our loss in property taxes from such “investments.” Finally, compute the price of 4,000 “dead” malls and countless Main Streets languishing in the wake of the highway-based exodus. The tragic loss of community cannot be reckoned.

What false economy allows us to dismiss these debts? To simply credit highway-based transportation as 18 percent of our gross domestic product—more than health and education combined?

What perverse sense of the environmental balance sheet lets us tamper with the fate of the planet without noting these debts? In the end, our fossil fuel government and industry underwrite the car culture that undermines planet preservation. It favors the private car vs. public transportation at seven-to-one, offers single-family mortgages and policies that undercut core cities and suburbs, and gives the highway men a free lunch on a silver platter.

**... and that's the complicity of two tons of rolling steel and wheel.**

the environmental balance sheet lets us tamper with the fate of the planet without noting these debts? In the end, our fossil fuel government and industry underwrite the car culture

**C**urbing the car to protect the climate is good financial as well as environmental policy. Making the car pay its way by altering pricing policies to stop the subsidies would reduce costs while cutting fossil fuel. Raising the

number of animals killed by cars: 1 million per day ... Percentage of automobile fatalities who were

## Built for Summer

**T**ransportation is more than about getting from point A to point B. It is integrally tied to land use, air and water quality, habitat and wilderness loss, public health and safety, and even the rise of political and social apathy. As metropolitan areas grow several times faster than their populations, we are consuming vast tracts of wilderness, farmland and open space and replacing them with oceanic parking lots, strip malls and isolated pods of tract housing and office parks.

The bicycle is the perfect vehicle to ride out of this mess. The environmental benefits of bicycling are unquestionable; zero-emission, human-powered transport is the ultimate tool of sustainability. Bicycles are inexpensive to manufacture and are affordable to families even on the most meager budgets. Bicycles require very little space in an urban setting

to maneuver and park. Bicycling fosters an ethos of living locally, and it keeps the body fit and the mind and reflexes sharp. In tandem with mass transit, bicycles permit a city to keep itself confined to less area,

and advocacy for an auto-free future. Though some happenings are already afoot, things really start rolling with the July 30 Critical Mass, which marks the seventh anniversary of the jubilant monthly group rides



ANDY SINGER

keeping wild lands and open space unpaved, intact—and nearby.

Which is why cyclists and environmentalists are descending on San Francisco for Bike Summer, a festival of direct action, recreation

that have since caught on in such cities as Sydney, New York, Berlin, Johannesburg, Rio de Janeiro, Chicago and Tokyo.

The idea for Bike Summer, the brainchild of cycling advocates in San

Francisco, quickly spread around the Internet last fall. The series of events has no leaders—just a lot of active and politically engaged coordinators. Activities planned so far include bike rodeos, family rides, street theater, daily “mini-masses,” group camping trips, covert bike lane stripings, art exhibits, cultural and natural history bike tours, film screenings, political strategy workshops, teach-ins and unicycle lessons.

Unprecedented in its international scope, Bike Summer may be the first big wave of the “velorution.” For more information, call the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition at (415) 431-BIKE or visit the Bike Summer Web site at [www.bikesummer.org](http://www.bikesummer.org), which also lists more contacts, accommodations, information and the calendar of events.

**Joshua Switzky  
and Joe Knowles**

tax on gas—or on carbon dioxide-spewing gas guzzlers or on number of miles driven—would lessen auto use and impact. So would congestion pricing, tolls and parking fees. It is time to follow the other industrialized nations of the world by raising gas prices to \$4 or \$5 a gallon, funneling these funds to good public transportation and lessening the need for autos in the first place.

Changing sprawl-inducing land patterns that have made two or three cars a (perceived) prerequisite in half our households is also essential. By reinvesting in public transportation, good planning, mixed-use zoning and other improved land use policies, we create dense neighborhoods and urban infill for the clustered physical environment that supports the mass transit, trains, bicycling and walking that will ease us out of the car trap.

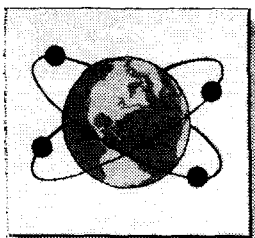
None of these routes to reduce auto-dependency and halt global warming is built in a day, but they can begin instantly on a personal and political level. As Washington

and Wall Street slouch their way to climate protection, we need to do more—far more—than give lip service to this mindset. “Cogito Ergo Zoom” is how *Automobile* magazine describes America’s attitude to the internal combustion machine. More cogitating and less zoom would be better. So would activism from the bottom and leadership from the top to replace a mentality as stuck in traffic as our way of life. The Atlantic would be rolling across the Adirondacks and the glaciers melting into Miami before the people who brought us the *Exxon Valdez* and the Corvair flipped the switch on their course to stop climatic upheaval. It is time for the rest of us to brake the automotive gluttons that fuel global disarray. ■

*Jane Holtz Kay is architecture and planning critic for The Nation and the author of Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back, from which portions of this article were drawn.*

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**pedestrians: 14 . . . Percentage of all federal transportation safety funds spent on pedestrian safety: 1**





# Gridlocked

## *Saving ourselves from sprawl*

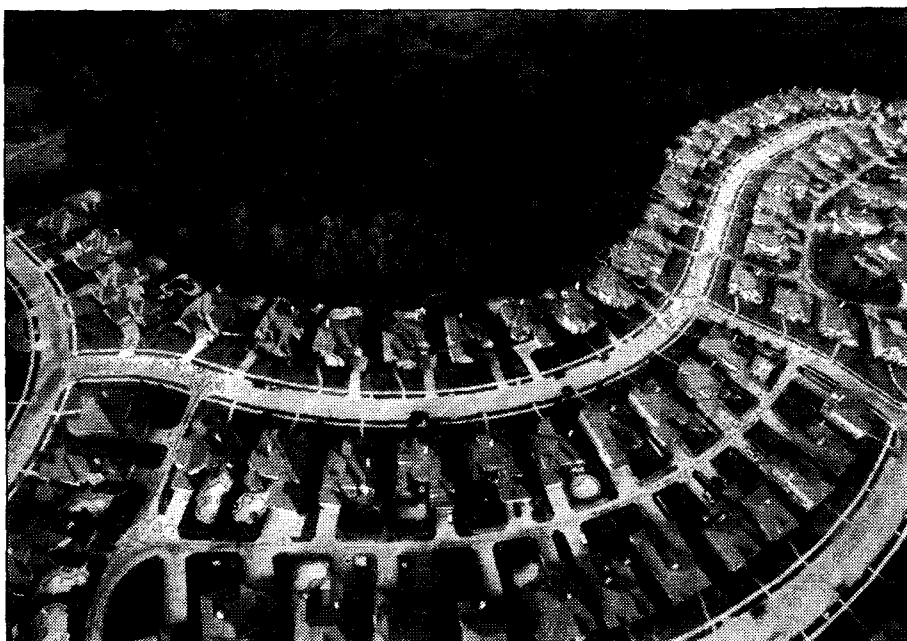
**By James B. Goodno**

**S**pend enough time in any Bay Area workplace and you're sure to hear tales from commuter hell. School teachers in Silicon Valley leave their homes in subdivisions 80 miles away before dawn—and make it to work just on time. Office workers spend hours inching through traffic to jobs in fast-growing edge cities. Even construction workers—famous for their early hours—find themselves struggling with traffic to make it to the job site on time.

"I had to give up," says one office worker of a brief stint working 40 miles from her home. "I hated the roads, I hated the commute." Her comments are common, but her ability to escape the congestion is rare. Despite an efficient and comfortable commuter rail service, which serves four of the nine Bay Area counties, most residents are victimized by a poor combination of land-use and transportation planning.

The bulk of the Bay Area's population—and most U.S. suburbanites—live in detached single-family homes in new subdivisions. Built on inexpensive former agricultural land, these subdivisions are sited beyond walking distance of transit stations. Automobile-focused suburban design discourages transit use by forcing residents to begin their commute by car. This creates a slew of environmental and social problems, including increased air pollution and the disappearance of open space—not to mention traffic-related stress.

**S**ocial and architectural critics attribute a broader set of problems to the same development patterns. Houses in sprawling suburbs are often situated far from schools, parks, shopping districts, churches and other traditional centers of community. Homes are designed to face inward with massive three-car garages, hidden front doors and fenced-in back yards. As a result, building and subdivision design inhibits the development of community sensibilities. In addition, a rapid increase in residential development puts stress on the municipal tax base, leading to insufficient funding for schools and other public services.



KRT PHOTOS

The separation between land-use and transportation planning hits city dwellers as well. As jobs have migrated out of the central city into suburban and edge-city locations, it has become increasingly more difficult for urbanites to get to work. This is a big problem in cities nationwide such as Cleveland, where 90 percent of new entry-level jobs are located outside of the city. And in Atlanta, "the public transit system is only operating in two counties, Fulton County and DeKalb County, where the majority of people are people of color," observes Robert Bullard, director of Clark Atlanta University's Environmental Justice Resource Center. "The jobs are in the surrounding counties. So most of the money has gone into building roads and into supporting the infrastructure for people who have cars." The result is that the gap between transportation and land-use practices, besides being harmful to the environment and quality of life, fosters racial and class conflict as well.

A myriad of policy and market factors explains the disconnection between transportation and land use in the United States. On the local level, state and regional agencies dominate transportation planning while municipal and county authorities control land use. More broadly, traditional federal transportation funding, tax deductions and home-lending policies, coupled with discriminatory banking practices, inexpensive

Oil spilled by the *Exxon Valdez*, 1989: 10 million gallons . . . Oil dumped or leaked in the United

gasoline and cheap land on the metropolitan fringe, have encouraged developers to build and home buyers to live in outer suburbs. These communities discourage transit-oriented development through zoning laws that limit density, ban mixed-use development and promote shopping mall construction.

Planners long have understood the link between land-use and public transportation. The more residences and jobs within walking distance of public transportation (and the more pedestrian-friendly the built environment), the more likely commuters are to make use of it. This is apparent in dense, older cities like New York, Boston and San Francisco, where city dwellers walk and ride imperfect bus, light rail and subway systems to a variety of destinations.

But planners say developments do not have to reach traditional urban levels of residential density to support public transit. Peter Calthorpe, a Berkeley architect and planner, says moderate densities of roughly 18 dwelling units to the acre will suffice. By comparison, densities in many successful urban neighborhoods range from 80 to 250 units per acre, while contemporary suburbs might have five or fewer units per acre.

Calthorpe believes other land-use and design changes would encourage better use of public transportation. "The metropolitan circulation framework should be layered, providing an arterial grid for through auto traffic, neighborhood streets for pedestrians and slow cars, a transit system reinforced by intensified stations and a pedestrian-dominated urban center," Calthorpe writes in his book *The Next American Metropolis*. "Pockets of mixed-use development with moderate densities and streets designed for both pedestrians and cars would support transit, even in the suburbs."

**D**evelopments similar to those proposed by Calthorpe are being built in cities and towns in various U.S. metropolitan areas. In the Bay Area, several municipalities have either changed zoning laws or allowed exceptions for the construction of higher-density housing near transit hubs. San Jose has taken the lead within Silicon Valley in promoting transit-oriented development. Although with 850,000 residents it is Northern California's largest city, San Jose's layout follows a low-density, suburban pattern. Buses and a single light-rail line serve the city and Santa Clara County, but transit connections to surrounding counties are poor and the transportation and land-use pattern is really designed for motorists. Identifying economic reasons to support transit-centered development is helping to move municipal policy forward, however. "When we compared subdivisions with single-family homes to housing around light rail, our findings showed that suburban development would strain the city's fiscal resources," says Laurel Prevetti, principal planner for the city. "So, there is a strong fiscal incentive to developing denser, transit-centered housing."

In 1991, San Jose identified 70 sites along existing transit corridors where it would encourage the construction of up to 13,700 units of higher-density housing. Significantly, these developments would contain housing for a mix of income groups, providing much needed affordable housing in settings that seem unlikely to fall into the squalor caused by concentrated poverty. To encourage development in these sites, the city offered a number of incentives, including zoning changes and in some cases public financing. At the same time, it enforced an urban services boundary, which withheld public services from would-be developments on the city's fringe. Nevertheless, progress has been slow. By 1998, just 2,400 units had been built.

Other steps are being taken to encourage more transit-oriented development in the United States. The Department of Transportation (DOT), for example, is making more money and support available under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), and has launched an initiative to help communities improve their transportation decision-making. In addition,

several environmental groups and some mortgage lenders have developed location-efficient mortgages, which offer low- and moderate-income borrowers less costly loans to buy in transit-friendly neighborhoods.

**D**OT efforts fit into a broader federal effort closely identified with Vice President Al Gore. Gore's efforts and mounting grassroots pressure have led the administration to initiate a "livability" program. The initiative includes \$700 million in new tax credits for Better America Bonds, which are designed to help communities leverage nearly \$10 billion over five years to improve water quality, protect green spaces and clean up brownfields. The initiative also proposes \$6.1 billion for public transit and \$1.6 billion to support state and local projects that reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. The \$6.1 billion for public transit would be a record, but it still pales in comparison with highway spending: The same DOT budget contains \$28.5 billion for the Federal Highway Administration.

Gore's advocacy of smart growth has given a localized movement national stature. It also has provided a lightning rod for dissent. Over the past year, the army of critics expanded from a base in libertarian and property-development circles to include mainstream pundits writing for daily newspapers and national magazines such as *The New Republic*. Within smart growth circles, some question the vice president's commitment to making the major changes in the federal budget and tax codes that they believe are necessary to really change development patterns. (For example, would Gore be willing to even tinker with the popular home mortgage tax deductions to discourage development on the suburban fringe?) But many more are simply pleased to have someone as prominent as Gore in their camp. "I have no criticism of

## ***Sprawl harms quality of life and the environment, and fosters racial and class conflict as well.***

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**States, 1997: 240 million gallons ... Cost to rebuild 5 miles of the Cypress Freeway in Oakland, Calif.:**  
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## Groningen, Netherlands: How It's Done

To a large extent, Americans do not cycle because the transportation planning and infrastructure for bicycling just doesn't exist. "Some of our most anti-bicycle traffic engineers here in the United States have belt buckles that never see the light of day," says James Mackay, a Denver city planner.

The Dutch city of Groningen provides a blueprint for American cities serious about seeking a way out of gridlock. Groningen was in a similar bind two decades ago, but now *Bicyclist* magazine identifies it as the top biking city in the world. How did the city manage the turnaround?

Groningen, with roughly 200,000 inhabitants, is the Netherlands' sixth-largest city. In 1977, ruinous traffic congestion led city planners to dig up

and "de-pave" streets and motorways. A six-lane intersection in the center of the city was torn up and replaced with greenery, walkways, cycle paths and bus lanes. And a little more than five years ago, the city set about creating a car-free downtown.

These actions have been both an environmental and economic success: Since 1977, the city has experienced sustained economic recovery. City population loss has been reversed and business, once opposed to anti-auto policies, is calling for more. The city now regularly receives requests from shopkeepers to enforce the "cyclization" policy on streets where car traffic still has not been banned. Says Gerrit van Werren, a senior city planner, "This is not an environmental program; it is an economic program.

We are boosting jobs and business. It has been proved that planning for the bicycle is cheaper than planning for the car."

All across the city, roads have been narrowed or closed to traffic.

Cycleways are constructed. New houses are built in such a way that the only direct access is by bicycle. Shopping centers and malls on the edges of the city have been banned. In short, the aim is to force cars to take longer and slower routes, while providing a "fine mesh" network for bicycles that gives them easy access to the center of the city.

New buildings must provide cycle garages. There are tens of thousands of parking spaces for bikes in guarded parks—the central railway station has over 3,000 of these spaces—and street racks. A

nuclear shelter under City Hall has been converted to a bike park.

Like the rest of the Netherlands, Groningen is fearful of out-of-control car growth. Its anti-auto policies and actions have been strong, and they do not come cheap. The city's 10-year bicycle program is costing \$32 million, but it estimates that every car it keeps off the road saves at least \$270 in noise, congestion, pollution, parking and health costs. "We don't want a good system for bicycles, we want a perfect system," van Werren says. "We want a system for bicycles that is like the German Autobahn for cars. We don't ride bicycles because we are poor, we ride them because it is fun, it is faster, it is convenient."

Doug Timmer

the vice president," says Minnesota state legislator Myron Orfield, echoing a sentiment expressed by other smart-growth advocates.

Regardless of what happens on the federal level, bringing transportation and land use together on a wider scale requires more effective regional planning. Combining well-planned mass transit with such smart growth practices as urban growth boundaries, metropolitan revenue sharing and a reformed regulatory structure can best be coordinated at the regional level. Without regional coordination, low-density, low-quality development will continue to take place in the outer burbs, where cheap land abounds.

Regional land-use planning does happen in some parts of the United States, notably Portland, Ore. and Minneapolis-St. Paul. While this hasn't created a panacea, it has made planners' work easier by making the overlay of jurisdictions less complicated. In most of the country, however, the divide between transportation and land-use planning remains craggy and great. In the Bay Area, for example, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) coordinates planning efforts with county transportation providers and congestion management authorities. Its real clout comes in controlling access to TEA-21 and other state and federal financing. But

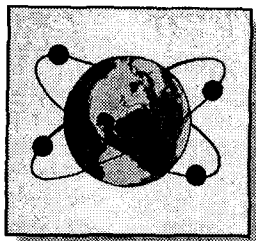
the MTC avoids involvement in land-use planning, leaving that to municipal and county authorities, some of whom are driven by fiscal imperatives to approve poorly conceived residential and commercial development.

The first step toward repairing this problem in our planning structure is building the political coalitions that will support and fight for appropriate reforms. Orfield, the Minnesota legislator, says coalitions of inner-city and suburban constituencies provide the key: "Getting the various types of suburbs to understand what their interests are is the biggest challenge."

Atlanta's Bullard adds that transportation and land-use concerns can bring together disparate constituencies. "We're all stuck in traffic, whether you are low-income or high-income, if you have a car and you're out there on the freeway, you're stuck on the freeway," he says. "What this means is that gridlock and lack of a coherent transportation system really may be the only thing that ties a lot of folks together." ■

James B. Goodno is the editor of *Urban Ecology*, a magazine covering planning and metropolitan affairs. Living in the Bay Area, he spends far too many hours stuck in traffic.

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\$1.2 billion . . . Total funding of National Endowment for the Arts, 1991 through 1998: \$1.15 billion



# Greenwashing Guru

## Mr. Sandman chases his dream

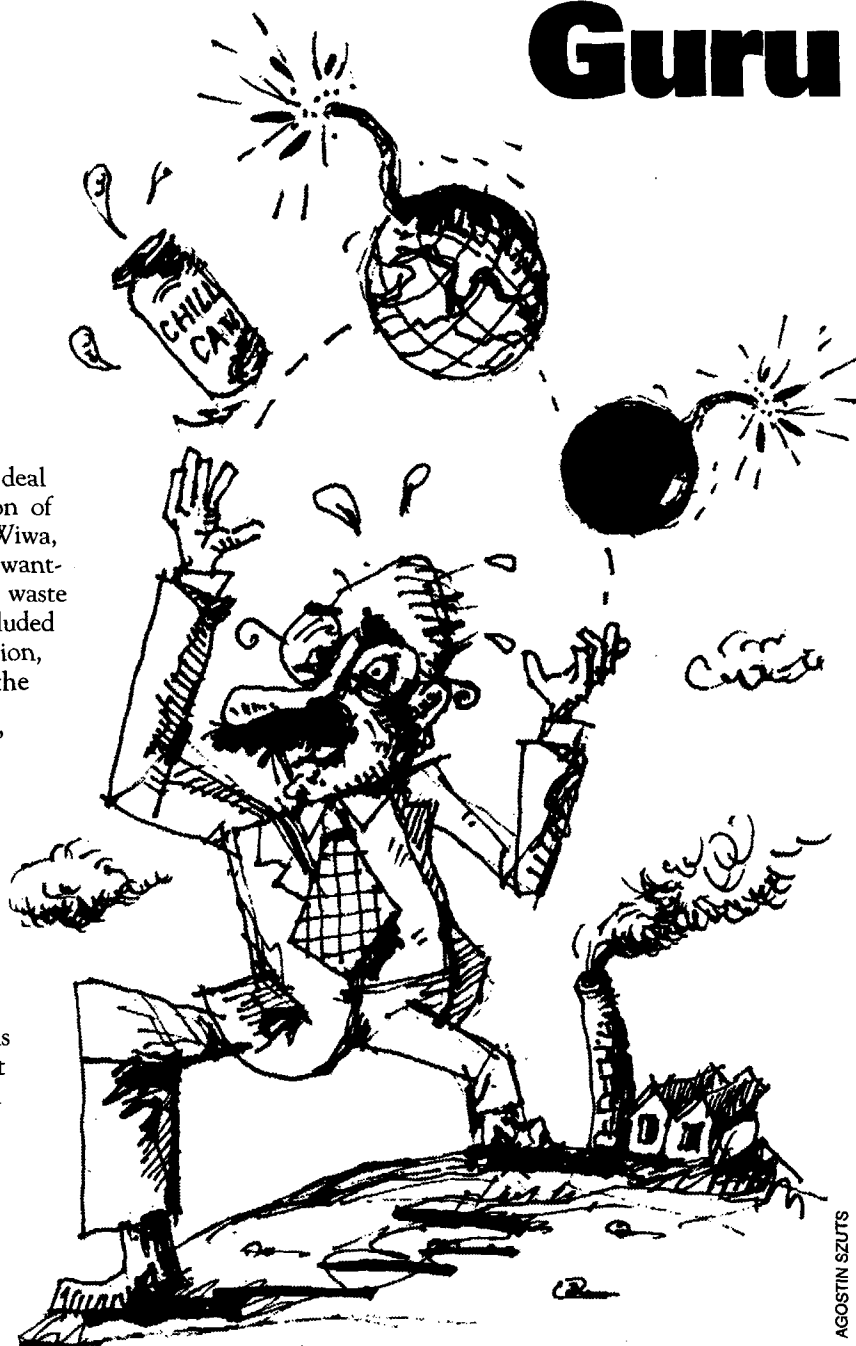
By Bob Burton

**W**hen Shell Oil was pondering how to deal with the backlash after the execution of Nigerian environmentalist Ken Saro Wiwa, he was there. When the Department of Energy wanted to improve the image of a Nevada nuclear waste dump, they called him. His clients have included ARCO, the Chemical Manufacturers Association, Du Pont, Exxon, Union Carbide—and the Environmental Defense Fund.

Peter Sandman, a “risk communication” consultant from Massachusetts, earns \$650 an hour from some of the biggest corporations embroiled in the messiest environmental controversies. A self-described “moderate environmentalist,” Sandman also has worked on retainer for more than 15 years for the EDF. With liberal credentials and disarming frankness, Sandman has become an important lobbyist for persuading some groups that they can achieve more by working with corporations than against them. “Activists and others must notice that companies have changed and reward them for changing,” he argues. “Activists who want progress have to reward progress.”

While telling environmentalists that “corporate engagement” is a way to achieve their goals, Sandman sells corporations on the benefits of decreased legal risk and further deregulation. But Sandman’s strategy steers environmentalists away from grassroots campaigns and into meetings outside the public view, leaving the policy agenda increasingly dominated by corporate associations. Companies can rebuild their tarnished credibility by involving environmentalists in corporate decision-making, while continuing to lobby behind the scenes to weaken existing environmental regulations.

Yet Sandman bemoans the dearth of environmental groups willing to cut deals. “[Sometimes] a chemical company is



willing to give up half a loaf but can't find anybody to take half a loaf. All it can find is people to accuse it of hypocrisy because it's half a loaf,” he says. “There has got to be somebody saying, ‘Wow! Half a loaf!’”

He concedes that greenwashing is common but argues that activists should give companies the benefit of the doubt rather than reject tentative change as hypocrisy. “The

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**Total miles traveled by car in the U.S., 1998: 2,618,459,000,000 ... Equivalent trips to Jupiter: 5,410 ...**



## Chilled Out

Helping to launch a self-chilling soda can that would substantially contribute to global warming might seem like a strange way to save the world. That didn't stop the Environmental Defense Fund from giving it a try.

The product in question was the Joseph Company's "chill can," which was designed to hold a soft drink, along with refrigerating aerosol gas that would chill the can's contents with the press of a button. "While this might seem a marvelous invention, the problem is that the cooling gas is HFC 134a, a chemical that is 3,400 times more powerful than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas," says Dr. Robin Pellew, director of

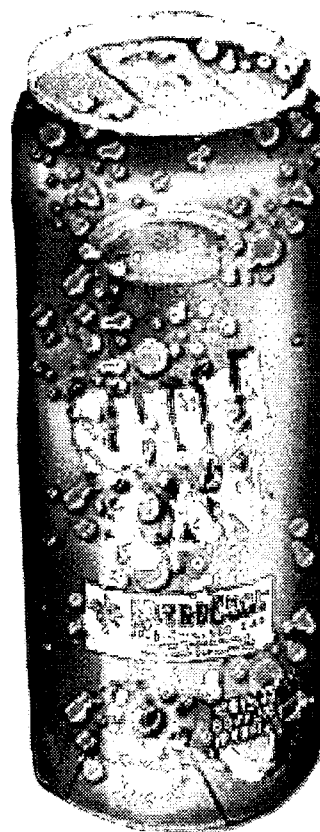
the British office of the World Wide Fund for Nature. "If millions of people start popping these cans, it will make a mockery of the international drive to reverse climate change."

Anxious to head off this sort of criticism, Joseph approached the EDF in 1996 about the possibility of developing a greenhouse gas "offsets" strategy. In exchange for support of the can from EDF, Joseph promised to support some activity that, in theory at least, would offset "110 percent" of the global warming impact caused by the product.

Exploration of the chill can "offsets" strategy was delegated to the Environmental Resources Trust (ERT), a nonprofit

group established by EDF that "seeks to use traditional financial tools to benefit environmental resources." ERT's mission is to protect the environment through "free market mechanisms." Its board of directors includes three EDF staff members, a philanthropist and representatives from the Audubon Society and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The chairman of the board is C. Boyden Gray, who is also head of the Washington-based Citizens for a Sound Economy, a powerful industry-backed, right-wing group that promotes deregulation. In 1997, Gray led the lobbying effort against moves by the Environmental



*Continued on next page*

second group is sometimes hard to find," he continues, "because you risk loss of the integrity of your group, you risk loss of membership, you risk loss of media credibility, maybe you risk loss of self-esteem."

One group willing to settle for "half a loaf" has been the EDF, which prides itself on its willingness to "seek out industry leaders to help solve problems." With a budget of \$27 million and 170 staff members, EDF is one of the largest environmental organizations in the United States; its executive director, Fred Krupp, was a student of Sandman's at the University of Michigan. Sandman has been a consultant to the EDF since the early '80s, but he is coy about the work he has done for them.

Marcia Aranoff, deputy director of the EDF, echoes Sandman's view that corporations respond to encouragement. "You don't make change with people who are already doing everything right," she says. "There is a presumption that if you are trying to change somebody's behavior that you are dealing with someone who has got a problem. We wouldn't work with somebody unless we thought there was the opportunity to make some significant progress in an important area."

One infamous example of the EDF's pro-business approach occurred in 1990, when McDonald's faced a growing campaign against its use of ozone-destroying styrofoam pack-

aging. Where others saw a corporate polluter, EDF saw opportunity. It approached McDonald's with a proposal to devise a joint "waste reduction plan." The result was a highly touted deal that got McDonald's press coverage as a "socially responsible" company and effectively cut the heart out of the anti-styrofoam campaign. Sandman helped with the details, advising the EDF on the "communication aspects" of the deal. "But it wouldn't be accurate to suggest that I initiated the contact or masterminded the agreement," he says.

It's clear that in these types of relationships, the corporations are the real victors. Perhaps the biggest winner, however, is Sandman. Between his expensive consulting services and a new software package, he has carved out a lucrative niche in the PR world. He is evangelical about his medicine for controversial companies—deal directly with your harshest critics, make concessions, and maybe even let them "win."

Sandman suggests that companies, rather than focusing on real hazards or harm to the public, should focus their public relations attention on perceptions of progress. Does the public think the company is responsive? Is it honest? Do decisions that effect the community seem voluntary or coerced? Is the company seen as doing something natural or industrial? Fair or

Percentage of Americans living in areas that fail federal air quality standards: 40 . . .

Continued from previous page

Protection Agency to improve air standards.

According to board member and EDF attorney Joe Goffman, Gray's involvement was part of a deliberate strategy. "We thought, here was a guy with a lot of credibility with business and with the Republican Party, as well as who was an advocate of market-based mechanisms," he says.

According to Goffman, Gray's involvement would signal to business and conservative politicians that ERT was serious about using market-based mechanisms for environmental outcomes.

In August 1996, the ERT board of directors approved "the development of a greenhouse gas offset" project with Joseph, with the can being "bundled with

greenhouse gas offsets to produce 'no net environmental impact.' "

According to Goffman, the EDF decided that the traditional advocacy approach of trying to stop the can's development would take too long and might fail. One of the "upsides" of the chill can project, from ERT's point of view, was that it could demonstrate the viability of the "emissions trading" approach to environmental protection that was being touted by market-oriented environmentalists.

Unfortunately for these free-market schemers, their plan fell afoul of controversy created by the "traditional" advocacy approach that EDF thought would be ineffective in stopping the chill can. A bevy of U.S. and British environmental groups

joined in mounting opposition to the can. Faced with this growing pressure, European environment ministers began considering a ban on its use.

In response, Joseph promised to substitute less damaging gases for the HFC 134a. Ironically, this promise to reduce the can's potential damage dramatically changed the equation for ERT, which was expecting to receive funding from Joseph to support the greenhouse "offsets" program. If the can produced less harm, Joseph's contribution to the ERT would also shrink. But before the project could proceed further, the British government announced a ban on the use of refrigerants for applications such as the self-chilling can. Because

of these factors, plus a growing public relations nightmare, the program was scrapped.

While the initial chill can proposal flopped, a revised chill can, which uses recycled industrial carbon dioxide gases, has been developed by the Joseph Company and approved by the EPA and the British government. The new can contributes less directly to greenhouse gas levels, but aluminum production remains one of the most ozone-damaging industries.

For its part, the EDF remains unrepentant, declining to comment on what it learned from the chill can debacle. Indeed, the group is actively looking for more partnerships to demonstrate its enthusiasm for corporate collaboration. **B.B.**

unfair? Answer these questions, Sandman says, and you are well on your way to managing public outrage.

Now, through a joint venture with the Australian subsidiary of the environmental consulting firm Dames and Moore, Sandman's analytic framework has been turned into a software package, which offers corporations a systematic framework to analyze and develop strategies for countering activist demands that threaten corporate activities. A demo version of the program can be downloaded at [www.qest.com.au](http://www.qest.com.au). If you want the real thing though, it sells for \$3,000 a copy.

The demo offers a hypothetical sample situation that lays out the following scenario: "Our factory in the South Side neighborhood has long had visible air emissions, sometimes very thick. The poor, minority residents, with whom we have very little relationship, recently began organizing to do something about the problem, maybe even shut us down."

The program then leads users through the steps needed to track and categorize people as allies, neutrals or opponents. Sandman's software invites PR managers to map the overlap between "passion" and "power" among these stakeholders. Depending on how they rank in these two areas, the company can choose one of four strategies: "deflect, defer, dismiss or defeat."

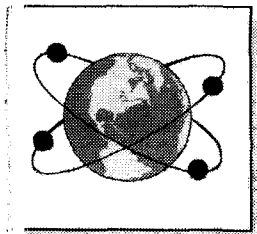
Sandman says real reform—the defer option—is necessary when dealing with people who have both high passion and high power. Far more preferable, he says, is defusing the opposition. The first step he suggests is that companies should tell environmental justice groups, "You are right to see yourselves as oppressed." Companies should then offer communities the choice of either insisting on environmental clean-up or trading possible benefits from the company for other social services. "This is indeed a way of getting external groups to face hard choices, and of outsourcing controversial decisions that would have little credibility if made within the company," he says.

Peter Sandman envisions a world where anything is tradable and solidarity between groups is seen as old-fashioned or even counter-productive. It is a world of realpolitik where environmentalists are encouraged to assume the omnipotence of corporate power and help design and implement the defeat of their own beliefs. A chill can here, a polluting chemical plant there. In Sandman's view, its time more activist groups became more like the EDF and said "Wow! Half a loaf!" ■

**Bob Burton** is an Australian environmental journalist based in Canberra. Parts of this article originally appeared in *PR Watch* ([www.prwatch.org](http://www.prwatch.org)).

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**Estimated number of Americans who die prematurely of respiratory diseases each year: 30,000 . . .**





# 30 Years After

## ***The legacy of America's largest nuclear test***

**By Jeffrey St. Clair**

**A**mchitka Island sits at the midway point on the great arc of Alaska's Aleutian Islands, less than 900 miles across the Bering Sea from the coast of Russia. Amchitka, a spongy landscape of maritime tundra, is one of the most southerly of the Aleutians. The island's relatively temperate climate has made it one of the Arctic's most valuable bird sanctuaries, a critical staging ground for more than 100 migratory species, as well as home to walruses, sea otters and sea lions. Off the coast of Amchitka is a thriving fishery of salmon, pollock, haddock and halibut.

All of these values were recognized early on. In 1913, Amchitka was designated as a national wildlife refuge by President William Howard Taft. But these ecological wonders were swept aside in the early '60s when the Pentagon and the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) went on the lookout for a new place to blow up H-bombs. Thirty years ago, Amchitka was the site of three large underground nuclear tests, including the most powerful nuclear explosion ever detonated by the United States.

The aftershocks of those blasts are still being felt. Despite claims by the AEC and the Pentagon that the test sites would safely contain the radiation released by the blasts for thousands of years, independent research by Greenpeace and newly released documents from the Department of Energy (DOE) show that the Amchitka tests began to leak almost immediately. Highly radioactive elements and gasses, such as tritium, americium-241 and plutonium, poured out of the collapsed test shafts, leached into the groundwater and worked their way into ponds, creeks and the Bering Sea. At the same time, thousands of Amchitka laborers and Aleuts living on nearby islands were put in harm's way. Dozens have died of radiation-linked cancers. The response of the federal government to these disturbing findings has been almost as troublesome as the circumstances surrounding the tests themselves: a consistent pattern of indifference, denial and cover-up continues even today.

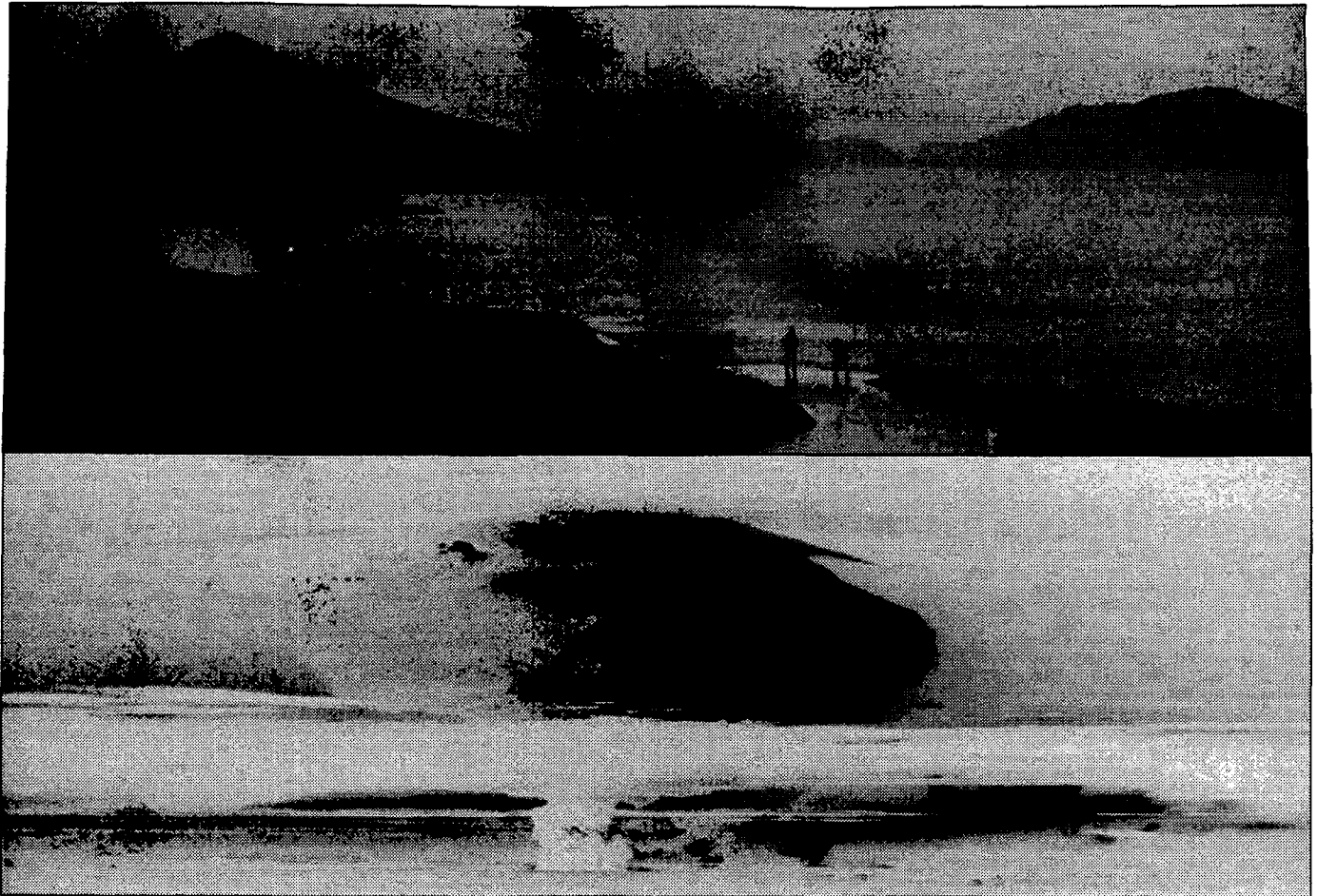
**T**here were several factors behind the selection of Amchitka as a test site. One most certainly was the proximity to the Soviet Union. These explosions were meant to send a message. Indeed, the tests were designed to calibrate the performance of the Spartan anti-ballistic missile, built to take out the Soviet nuclear arsenal. Publicly, however, the rationale offered by the AEC and the Defense Department was simply that Amchitka was a remote, and therefore safe, testing ground. "The site was selected—and I underscore the point—because of the virtually zero likelihood of any damage," claimed James Schlesinger, then chairman of the AEC.

What Schlesinger and his cohorts overlooked was the remarkable culture of the Aleuts. Amchitka may have been remote from the continental United States, but for nearly 10,000 years it had been the home of the Aleuts. Indeed, anthropologists believe the islands around Amchitka may be the oldest continuously inhabited area in North America. The Aleuts left Amchitka in the 1880s after Russian fur traders had wiped out the sea otter population, but they continued to inhabit nearby islands and relied on the waters near Amchitka for subsistence. The Aleuts raised forceful objections to the tests, pointing to the risk of radiation leaks, earthquakes and tsunamis that might overwhelm their coastal villages. These concerns were never addressed by the federal government. In fact, the Aleuts were never consulted about the possible dangers at all.

In 1965, the Long Shot test exploded an 80 kiloton bomb. The \$10 million test, the first one supervised by the Pentagon and not the AEC, was really a trial run for bigger things to come. But small as it was, there were immediate problems. Despite claims by the Pentagon that the test site would not leak, radioactive tritium and krypton-85 began to seep into freshwater lakes almost instantly. But evidence of radioactivity, collected by Defense Department scientists only three months after the test, was kept secret for five years. The bomb site continues to spill toxins into the environment. In 1993, EPA researchers detected high levels of tritium in groundwater samples taken near the test site.

The contamination from Long Shot didn't deter the Pentagon bomb-testers. In 1969, the AEC drilled a hole 4,000 feet deep into the rock of Amchitka and set off the Milrow nuclear test. The one megaton blast was 10 times as powerful as Long Shot. The AEC called it a "calibration test" designed to see if Amchitka could withstand a much larger test. The evidence should have convinced them of their dangerous folly.

Percentage of drivers who say they are angry most of the time while driving: 80 . . . Percentage of



The blast triggered a string of small earthquakes and several massive landslides; knocked water from ponds, rivers and lakes more than 50 feet into the air; and, according to government accounts, "turned the surrounding sea to froth."

**A** year later, the AEC and the Pentagon announced their plans for the Cannikin nuclear test. At five megatons, Cannikin was to be the biggest underground nuclear explosion ever conducted by the United States. The blast would be 385 times as powerful as the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Cannikin became a rallying point for native groups, anti-war and anti-nuke activists, and the nascent environmental movement. Indeed, it was opposition to Cannikin by Canadian and American greens, who tried to disrupt the test by taking boats near the island, that sparked the birth of Greenpeace.

A lawsuit was filed in federal court, charging that the test violated the Limited Test Ban Treaty and the newly enacted National Environmental Policy Act. In a 4 to 3 decision, the Supreme Court refused to halt the test. What the Court didn't know, however, was that six federal agencies, including the departments of State and Interior, and the fledgling EPA, had lodged serious objections to the Cannikin test, ranging from environmental and health concerns to legal and diplomatic problems. Nixon issued an executive order to keep the

comments from being released. These documents, known as the Cannikin Papers, came to symbolize the continuing pattern of secrecy and cover-up that typified the nation's nuclear testing program. Even so, five hours after the ruling was handed down on Nov. 6, 1971, the AEC and the Pentagon pulled the switch, detonating the Cannikin bomb.

In an effort to calm growing public opposition, AEC chief Schlesinger dismissed environmental protesters and the Aleuts as doomsayers, taking his family with him to watch the test. "It's fun for the kids and my wife is delighted to get away from the house for awhile," he quipped.

With the Schlesingers looking on, the Cannikin bomb, a 300-foot-long device implanted in a mile-deep hole under Cannikin lake, exploded with the force of an earthquake registering 7.0 on the Richter Scale. The shock of the blast scooped a mile-wide, 60-foot-deep subsidence crater in the ground over the test site and triggered massive rockfalls.

The immediate ecological damage from the blast was staggering. Nearly 1,000 sea otters, a species once hunted to near extinction, were killed—their skulls crushed by the shockwaves of the explosion. Other marine mammals died when their eyes were blown out of their sockets or when their lungs ruptured. Thousands of birds also perished, their spines snapped and their legs pushed through their bodies. (Neither the Pentagon nor the Fish and Wildlife Service has ever stud-

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**world population who can afford a car: 10 . . . Percentage of world population who can afford a bicycle:**



and the long-term ecological consequences of the Amchitka explosions.) Most worrisome was that a large volume of water from White Alice Creek vanished after the blast. The disappearance of the creek was more than a sign of Cannikin's horrific power. It was also an indication that the project had gone terribly wrong; the blast ruptured the crust of the earth, sucking the creek into a brand new aquifer, a radioactive one.

In the months following the explosion, blood and urine samples were taken from Aleuts living in the village of Adak on a nearby island. The samples were shown to have abnormally high levels of tritium and cesium-137, both known carcinogens. Despite these alarming findings, the feds never went back to Adak to conduct follow-up medical studies. The Aleuts, who continue their seafaring lifestyle, are particularly vulnerable to radiation-contaminated fish and marine mammals, and radiation that might spread through the Bering Sea, plants and iceflows.

**B**ut the Aleuts weren't the only ones exposed to Cannikin's radioactive wrath. More than 1,500 workers who helped build the test sites, operate the bomb tests and clean up afterward were also put at risk. The AEC never conducted medical studies on any of these laborers. When the Alaska District Council of Laborers of the AFL-CIO, began looking into the matter in the early '90s, the DOE claimed that none of the workers had been exposed to radiation. They later were forced to admit that exposure records and dosimeter badges had been lost.

In June 1996, two Greenpeace researchers, Pam Miller and Norm Buske, returned to Amchitka. Buske, a physicist, collected water and plant samples from various sites on the island. Despite claims by the DOE that the radiation would be contained, the samples taken by Buske revealed the presence of plutonium and americium-241 in freshwater plants at the edge of the Bering Sea. In other words, Cannikin continues to leak. Both of these radioactive elements are extremely toxic and have half-lives of hundreds of years.

In part because of the report issued by Miller and Buske, a new sense of urgency was lent to the claims of laborers who said they had become sick after working at the Amchitka nuclear site. In 1998, the union commissioned a study by Rosalie Bertell, a former consultant to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (which replaced the AEC). Bertell found that hundreds of Amchitka workers were exposed to ionizing radiation at five times the level then recognized as hazardous. However, the research is complicated by the fact that many of the records from the Amchitka blast remain classified and others were simply tossed away. "The loss of

worker exposure records, or the failure to keep such records, was inexcusable," Bertell says.

One of the driving forces behind the effort to seek justice for the Amchitka workers and the Aleuts is Beverley Aleck. Her husband Nick helped drill the mile-deep pit for the Cannikin test; four years later, he died of myelogenous leukemia, a type of cancer associated with radiation exposure. Aleck, an Aleut, has waged a multi-year battle with the DOE to open the records and to begin a health monitoring program for the Amchitka workers. In April of this year, the Clinton administration finally agreed to begin the first health survey of the Amchitka workers. The study was supposed to begin this summer, but it is languishing without funding.

Will the victims of the Amchitka blasts ever get justice? Don't count on it. For starters, the Aleuts and Amchitka workers are specifically excluded by the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act from receiving medical assistance, death benefits or financial compensation. There is move to amend this legal loophole, but even that wouldn't mean the workers and Aleuts would be treated fairly. The DOE has tried repeatedly to stiff arm other cases by either dismissing the link between radiation exposure and cancer or, when that fails, invoking a "sovereignty" doctrine, which claims the agency is immune from civil lawsuits.

Dr. Paul Seligman, deputy assistant secretary of the DOE's Office of Health Studies, writes it off as the price of the Cold War. "These were hazardous operations," Seligman says. "The hazards were well understood, but the priorities at the time were weapons production and the defense of the nation."

At a time when the mainstream press and Republican politicians are howling over lax security at nuclear weapons sites and Chinese espionage, a more dangerous betrayal of trust is the withholding of test data from the American public. China may use the Los Alamos secrets to upgrade its tiny nuclear arsenal, but the Amchitka explosions already have imperiled a thriving marine ecosystem and caused dozens of lethal cancers.

The continuing cover-up and manipulation of information by the DOE not only denies justice to the victims of Amchitka, but indicates that those living near other DOE sites may be at great risk. "DOE management of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex is of the old school in which bad news is hidden," says Pamela Miller, now executive director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics. "This conflicts with sound risk management and makes the entire system inherently risky. The overwhelming threat is of an unanticipated catastrophe."

***China may use the Los Alamos secrets to upgrade its tiny nuclear arsenal, but the Amchitka explosions already have imperiled a thriving marine ecosystem and caused dozens of lethal cancers.***

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 ☼ ... What the United States would be called if it were a flower: a carnation. --Compiled by Greg Howard

# THE NEW BEIRUT

(AND SOME OLD PROBLEMS)

BY ROBIN SHULMAN

BEIRUT, LEBANON

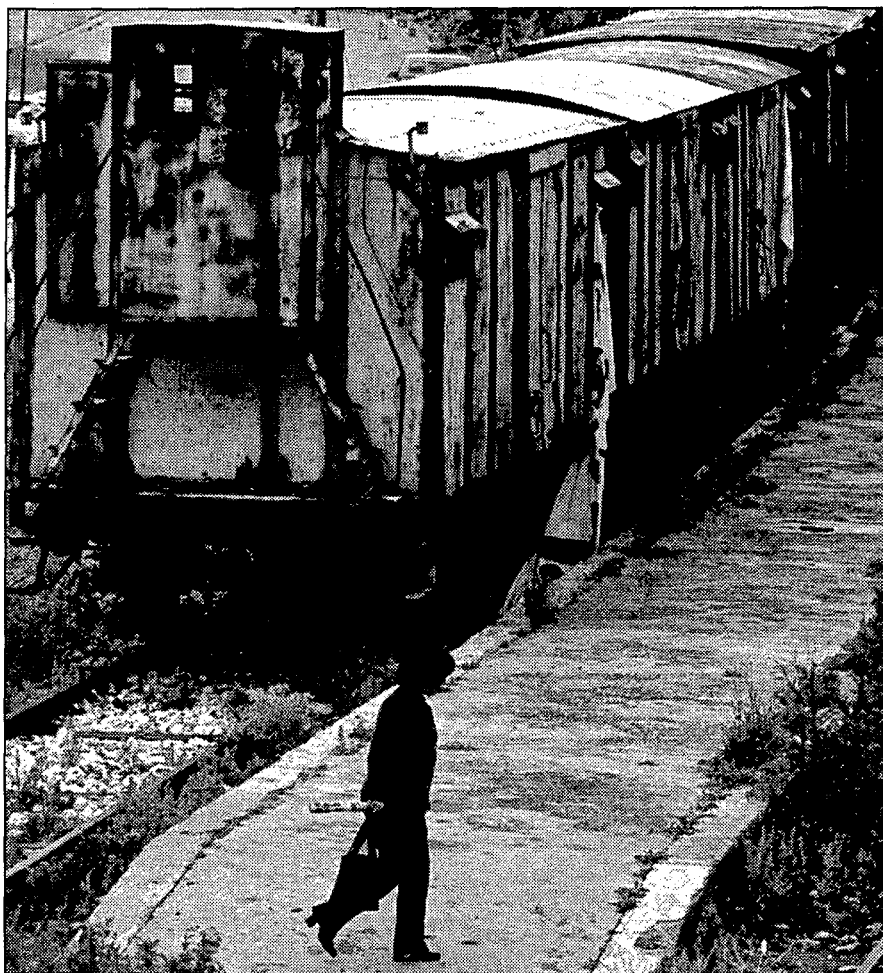
**L**ife in Beirut is a fusion of urban sophistication and frustration, Mediterranean seaside calm and Middle Eastern political-religious tension. Neighborhoods of crumpled, artillery-scarred buildings thrive on the borders of glitzy postwar high-rises. The northern sections of town lean toward America, with a McDonald's and a Hard Rock Cafe; the southern suburbs tend toward Iran, their walls covered by posters of Tehran clerics. In the city center, patrols of armed Syrian and Lebanese troops pass a group of women on the street—one is decked out in a miniskirt and crop top, one in *hijab* (Muslim cloak and headscarf) and another is wearing a modest headscarf, skintight pants and platform shoes. After years of civil war, Lebanon still is struggling to come to terms with its extremes.

While prewar Beirut once was a vibrant trade center for Arab and European goods, fortunes and ideas, 15 years of civil strife destroyed its viability. Since the war's end in 1990, Lebanon has been positioning itself to recapture a leading role in the Middle East, only to be stymied by the absence of regional peace. Now that could change: New Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has vowed to end the fighting in the zone of Lebanon that Israel has occupied for 21 years. A peace

deal is only part of the recipe for Lebanon's full recovery. Lebanon also must address its more persistent problems of sectarian tension and Syrian intervention, for it to become a significant player in a new Middle East.

**T**he civil war was marked by constantly shifting alliances and battle lines among 18 recognized religious groups backed by outsiders such as Israel, Syria, Iran, Iraq, the United States and the Soviet Union. The conflict stemmed from a sectarian political system—conceived in 1943 while Lebanon was under French control—mandating religious quotas for the civil service and legislature and decreeing that the president must be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker a Shiite Muslim. Rather than providing each sect with proportional representation in a country roughly split between Christians and Muslims, the system bolstered the Maronite-dominated status quo by relying on an outdated 1936 census that was never replicated for fear of reversing its findings.

By the '70s, the numbers had changed. The rural, under-served Shiites had become the largest religious group but still wielded less political power than the Maronites or Sunnis.



JOSEPH BARRAK/AFP

Has Lebanon missed its train?



The fragile balance was further upset by the Palestinians, who had set up a powerful mini-state in Lebanon after Jordan kicked out the PLO in 1970. The Maronites, who refused to relinquish their dominance, eventually instigated the war—which in 1975 splintered the army along sectarian lines, felled the state apparatus, and descended into an anarchy of retaliatory attacks. The militias carved out homelands for their own people, excising members of other sects with violence and intimidation. As many as 300,000 people were killed, many more injured, thousands kidnapped and about 750,000 left homeless.

The Taif agreement, brokered by the United States and Syria in 1989, finally ended the war. The peace deal brought the old Lebanese elites together with newer warlords to rule the country under the watchful eye of Damascus. By then, Lebanon's infrastructure was shot: There was no consistent access to water, electricity or roads. Beirut's downtown was decimated, as was much of the rest of the city and country, now divided among religious groups. Regional tourism and investment were in a slump. Banks had relocated to Dubai and high-tech companies had set up in Tel Aviv. There seemed to be little need for a commercial and cultural locus in the style of prewar Beirut.

**B**ut Rafiq Hariri, who became prime minister in 1992, had a vision to bring Beirut back as a regional hub. Applying his personal fortune, Hariri hatched a plan to clean up, internationalize and cash in on peacetime Lebanon. He empowered a quasi-governmental body to construct megaprojects such as a convention center, sports stadium and new airport. And, in a reconstruction scheme of unprecedented scope, he set up the joint stock corporation Solidere to rebuild downtown Beirut. Property owners were forced to renovate or sell their holdings, and Solidere paid nearly \$1 million to the mostly Shiite refugees squatting in downtown buildings to leave. In May 1994, 8,000 workers began reconstructing a banking, shopping and residential center with such attention to detail that they tested the stone of each building in order to mine replacement pieces from the original quarries.

The showy downtown was the only area targeted for comprehensive reconstruction. Yet, unzoned and unregulated, new real estate development has sprung up everywhere else, from lines of high-rises walling off the city from the sea, to a grocery store on the ground floor of a building bent by bombs and grown through with weedy trees. "Everything is operating on hyperdrive," says Beirut architect Abdul-Halim Jabr, a project manager who has worked for Solidere. "Most of the upgrading around the city is led by private initiative. This is the success story of Beirut—and where most of the danger lies."

Although the size of the Solidere project drew initial international attention, the construction and the excitement have slowed. By 1998, Hariri's rebuilding plan had run

up a \$15 billion domestic and foreign debt, 113 percent of the Lebanese GNP. Solidere, which represents 80 percent of Lebanon's total market capitalization, declared a 30 percent fall in profits from 1997 to 1998. Other Lebanese companies haven't fared much better. An April report by international investment firm Fleming Securities found the Beirut stock exchange, with only 14 companies, to be one of the

worst performers among emerging markets.

And while new luxury apartments await tenants, many poor families still lack housing. A 1995 study by the U.N. Economic and Social Council for West Asia found that about 1 million Lebanese (of a population of 3.5 million) live below the absolute poverty line of approximately \$618 per month, in a country where the cost of urban living is comparable with the United States. The poor—especially Shiites, Palestinians and migrant Syrians—are largely relegated to sect-based slums with erratic water supplies and pirated electricity. The middle class hasn't fared much better, suffering from hyperinflation and high taxes, like the 20 percent levy on gasoline in the newest proposed budget.

By the time technocrat Salim al-Hoss took over as

prime minister last winter, Lebanon was far from a powerhouse, but it was at least back on the international stage. Jabr says, "The day Euronews put Beirut on the list of world cities in the weather section, it was a media event here."

**H**owever, Lebanon is still known more for war than weather. The country regularly makes news because of its ongoing conflict with Israel, which occupies a border strip in southern Lebanon comprising 10 percent of the state's total territory. Hezbollah guerrillas are leading the fight to oust the 1,500 Israeli soldiers and their proxies, 2,500 Lebanese Christian militiamen. Their daily skirmishes wreak havoc on civilian life in the occupied zone, and keep current the possibility of Israeli airstrikes anywhere in Lebanon.

That risk could end soon. After the election of Barak, the Christian militia pulled back from Jezzine, an enclave it had held for 14 years. The move was widely seen as a test run for further withdrawal that might end the long Israeli occupation of the south. If a peaceful Middle East emerges, Israel and Lebanon would be competitors. Both have service-oriented economies, highly skilled but expensive work forces, long-term connections to the West—plus a freewheeling city nightlife and the same Mediterranean beaches.



Former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri has stirred up trouble since he left office last fall.

JANAL SAID/REUTERS

Right now there is no contact between the countries. There are no phone connections. It is illegal to travel to Israel from Lebanon, and foreigners with Israeli stamps on their passports are turned away at the border. Nonetheless, Lebanon has been studying its powerful neighbor. Books on Israeli economics and politics litter the desktops of Beirut academics. Autobiographies of Israeli prime ministers are prominently displayed in bookstores. Local English- and French-language newspapers report not only on Israeli incursions into the south, but also on the rebuilding of a Jewish cemetery in Beirut and the resurgence of Yiddish theater in Israel.

Even Hezbollah seems to be preparing to close the battlefield. These days, instead of attacking the Lebanese system, Hezbollah is thriving within it, winning seats in national parliament and municipal government and running a staggering network of free or low-cost social services: literacy programs, hospitals, schools, homes for the elderly, women's small-business collectives and construction crews that repair the damage caused by Israeli raids. The Taif accords smoothed Hezbollah's way into the parliamentary system, by changing the mandated Christian-to-Muslim ratio in parliament from 6-to-5 to an even split. Since then, the Shiite Hezbollah has gained singular respect in Lebanese politics for not being "thieves and charlatans," says Paul Salem, head of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies in Beirut.

The western media remember Hezbollah, or Party of God, as the militant group whose members were suspected in the '80s of bombing the U.S. embassy and Marines base in Beirut and numerous kidnappings. Today's Hezbollah has renounced those tactics. Though Hezbollah spokesman Ibrahim Elmoussawi admits the group is still backed by Iran and Syria, he emphasizes the party's role as a national liberator in the current armed struggle against Israel's occupation. "We are not fighting for a narrow interest," says Elmoussawi, a scion of the family that founded Hezbollah in the early '80s. "Every inch of territory that's liberated—the Lebanese authority would spread and be the power there. We wouldn't replace them in any way."

In recent years, the military confrontation with Israel has drawn Lebanese factions together. During Israel's 17-day bombing campaign in 1996 that killed 165 civilians and destroyed highways, power lines and houses, Christians clamored to support and fund Hezbollah. Elmoussawi recalls a visit to a Christian sector where women offered their bracelets, earrings and gold. They told him: "Please, I don't have cash money. Take them. Please launch Katyusha [rocket] attacks against the Israelis."

Elmouraw, who is working on his second master's degree in international affairs at the American University of Beirut, acknowledges that an Islamic republic is unlikely to come to Lebanon, given the many religious sects and secular citizens. "We want Islam to rule," he says. "But we believe in applying it through democratic ways, through dialogue, not to impose it through force."

Some observers point to Hezbollah as a model of how an extremist group can be absorbed into a system open enough to accept it. Says Ahmad Mousalli, an expert on Islamic

movements, "Hezbollah provides a possible example of the ability of the modern nation-state to take in Islamists instead of turning them into killers. These people like to live their life in this way. ... If they're not trying to impose the lifestyle on me, fine."

However, other armed groups have not been incorporated into the system—making them more likely to sabotage any future peace arrangement. There are 350,000 dissatisfied Palestinians living in Lebanese territory in 12 refugee camps. About 8 percent of Lebanon's population, they have been denied citizenship and work permits. Languishing in U.N.-serviced slums, their internal conflicts regularly turn violent. Lebanon, reluctant to further upset its precarious

internal balance, wants Israel to take them back. But it is unlikely they will be allowed to return to their ancestral villages, for Israel too wants to maintain its religious balance. Certain factions, armed and hostile to peace with Israel, could threaten any settlement:

**S**ome observers credit Syria's heavy hand with keeping a lid on Lebanon's social and religious tensions. But through efforts such as the Taif agreement, Damascus has helped to entrench religious tensions and ensure the need for its arbitrating touch. Syrian troops, deployed at the close of the civil war ostensibly to stabilize Lebanon, have become semi-permanent strongmen for the policies of

Syrian President Hafez al-Assad, whose picture is splashed over billboards throughout Lebanon. Along with 40,000 soldiers, the Syrian presence includes a network of intelligence agents and a million workers competing for jobs with their Lebanese counterparts under the guise of cooperation. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for Lebanese citizens is nearly 20 percent.

Damascus pulls the political levers as well, putting forth the candidates for prime minister and president and pressuring legislators to support them. Major irregularities were reported in the most recent 1996 elections—which were boycotted by 70 percent of the electorate—including payoffs, intimidation and false votes. "People feel the system's a sham," says one political observer, speaking anonymously. "Why even vote? The parliament is not legitimate."

While in office, many of Hariri's restrictive policies seemed to both serve his cartel-like financial networks and fulfill directives from Damascus intended to scale back civil society. For example, Hariri's government placed new restrictions on the famously free Lebanese press. In 1996, a new licensing system shut down television stations that had proliferated during the war by issuing only four broadcasting permits, one of which went to Hariri's own Future Television. Journalists are afraid of making comments that could be deemed critical of the Syrian regime—a crime under a 1991 Lebanese-Syrian pact prohibiting publication of anything potentially harmful to either state's security. The army has been deployed to pre-

**"TWENTY YEARS AGO, PEOPLE WERE EXCITED—SET UP A ROAD-BLOCK, GIVE THEM A GUN AND THEY HAVE A MOVEMENT. THAT'S NOT TRUE NOW."**



vent demonstrations and elected trade union leaders have been unseated and replaced with government supporters.

Despite his personal wealth and power, Hariri failed to break free from Syrian constraints. He stepped down last November, when it became clear that Damascus, which had handpicked army commander Emile Lahoud to be president, intended to scale back prime ministerial power. While the Taif agreement stripped the presidency of some authority, Damascus' reshuffling placed inordinate power with Lahoud, a Maronite, upsetting the existing sectarian balance.

Lahoud has leveled charges of corruption and graft against Hariri, who has shot back with allegations of incompetence. The former prime minister has stirred up trouble since he left office, attempting to create a new broad-based political party, making high-profile visits to foreign leaders, launching a daily newspaper and organizing such events as June's Luciano Pavarotti concert—at which a crowd of 16,000 gave Hariri a standing ovation.

Soon after the concert, the state-run media aired a scorching attack on Hariri from anonymous "ministerial" sources, accusing the former prime minister of trying to "sabotage" the state by calling for government change and to splinter Lebanon's united front with Syria in negotiations with Israel. Prime Minister Hoss later said the charges did not originate in the cabinet, and most analysts suspect the story can be sourced to Damascus.

As peace negotiations appear close at hand, Syria is especially anxious to keep its interests bound with Lebanon's so it can use its power to contain Hezbollah as leverage to push for its own concessions from Israel. In Beirut, there is fear

that Damascus also intends to use a peace deal to cement its hold on Lebanon.

**W**hile the issue of Syrian control divides the Lebanese, there is no sense here that the country will return to war. "Twenty years ago, people were excited—set up a road-block, give them a gun, and they have a movement. That's not true now," says Salem, the political scientist. "The dreams before the war of a new country and state are over. We must all live together in Lebanon; we accept it."

Hoss concurs: "People are not in the mood [for political violence]. They saw the destruction it caused. Now there's a parliament, a political system. If people have a problem they take it there. Things have changed."

Whole generations were shaped by the civil war. According to a study by sociologist Muhamad Faour, some 40 percent of students at the American University witnessed the death of a close relative or friend during the civil war years. Lebanese men in their forties or fifties are likely to have fought one another; men in their thirties too, if they did not flee abroad; those in their twenties learned as children to fire a Kalashnikov machine gun and make good with the local militia. With this background, the Lebanese take comfort in the fact that the state is functional at all.

For now, internecine religious warfare has mellowed into leagues of sect-based soccer teams—all the major communities and political parties have one, including Hezbollah. The religious epithets hurled during matches only occasionally turn violent. When the spectators get out of hand, arrests are made. The incident ends. The crowds go home. ■



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# We Are All Utopians

By David Graeber

**F**or the past 20 years, the left has been in a rout. Whole movements have collapsed; capitalism seems everywhere triumphant. For obvious reasons, we have been doing a lot of soul-searching. And gradually, a broad consensus has emerged: Our great mistake was naïve utopianism. Fixed on daydreams of a radically different, impossible society, we ignored human realities and human nature. Hence, radical movements were either doomed to political ineffectiveness; or, if by coincidence they were occasionally catapulted into power, to horrific killing fields as they tried to twist societies into shapes they simply would not go. First and foremost, we needed to stop demanding the impossible.

## Whose Millennium?

### Theirs or Ours?

By Daniel Singer

Monthly Review Press

295 pages, \$17.95

## The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy

By Russell Jacoby

Basic Books

236 pages, \$26

But this assessment is almost entirely wrong. Abandoning utopian dreams has not led to the birth of a new, vital, pragmatic left. Instead, it has made us almost completely irrelevant. After all, what was this anti-utopian wisdom but what right-wingers had been saying about us all along?

It perhaps was only a matter of time before, having soberly quaffed a cup offered them by their mortal enemies, progressives would begin to wonder why they were starting to turn green and die. This is why books like Daniel Singer's *Whose Millennium? Theirs or Ours?* and Russell Jacoby's *The End of Utopia* could not have appeared at a better time. Both openly challenge this consensus; both say something that desperately needs to be said.

**B**oth are excellent books—written in simple and elegant prose, with wit and frequent grace. They are, however, considerably different in tone. Jacoby, a cultural historian at UCLA, is known mainly for his work on the pretensions of American academic radicals. His latest book focuses on these same characters; as a result, subjects like electoral politics, labor organizing or economic policy hardly even come up. Of the two books, Jacoby's is the funnier, but ultimately, the most bleak. For Singer, long-time European correspondent for *The Nation*, makes the quest for a fundamentally different social order seem a matter of simple decency and good sense. Much of his book consists of scouring the European political scene for the place from which the next great challenge to capitalism will emerge.

The core of Jacoby's book consists of an unsparing analysis of what passes for radicalism in America today (multiculturalism, postmodernism, identity politics, etc.). Strip away the wild rhetoric, he notes, and you usually find watered-down liberalism and a naïve embrace of the values of the market: endless flux, destabilization, the right to fashion one's own individual identity from the jumbled bits of consumer culture. A kind of neoliberalism that dares not speak its name:

For instance, an exponent of Native American studies denounces the educational imperialism of Eurocentric education. Native traditions "challenge, at root," the "dominant-subordinate construction" and the "social hegemony" of Euro-American superiority. Up to now Eurocentrism "marginalizes Ethnic Studies or American Indian Studies or Gender Studies," states M. Annette Jaimes Guerrero, a California professor. What must be done? Head for the hills? Blow up the mainstream institutions? Not exactly. "American Indian Studies will need to be able to stand on its own as a fully accredited discipline with departmental status and even with a broader institutional standing."

This is typically argued without losing a beat. Ethnic studies is marginalized; it threatens the core of Western domination. Conclusion? We want the Western overlords to give us more support and money. Once upon a time revolutionaries tried, or pretended to try, to make a revolution; they harbored a vision of a different world or society. Now dubbed radical multiculturalists, they apply for bigger offices.

The quote gives a good idea of the book's overall flavor. Singling out Guerrero seems awfully mean; and certainly Native American studies does not deserve to be dismissed so completely out of hand. But who can argue with Jacoby's final point? The problem is, for all that Jacoby's book pokes fun at those who merely wish to critique the world—and not to change it—his own book is not all that different. He doesn't identify himself with any larger movement, or anything really larger than himself. Since he does not seem to be addressing any community (even of potential utopians) he ends up looking at history purely as a spectator, not an agent; hence, the most optimistic thing one can say is, "You never know. Something might turn up."

**As the left dropped the visionary ball, conservatives suddenly started posing as revolutionaries.**

Singer, on the other hand, writes as if every word were addressed to fellow members of a revolutionary movement, or at least, people (students, disgruntled young workers, intellectuals) who might join one. The book begins with a sober assessment of what went wrong in the Soviet Union. Singer proceeds to a masterful account of the tragic developments in post-communist Russia, and finally to Poland, where the labor movement that first rose up in the name of workers' self-management ended up collapsing into Thatcherite barbarism. There is little hope, Singer concludes,



in any new alternative to capitalism emerging from that part of the world again any time soon.

Western Europe, however, is a somewhat different story. It was there that the neoliberal offensive—the assertion that in this age of the “global economy” there is simply no alternative to savage, winner-takes-all capitalism—first began. The second half of the book begins with the great French “summer of discontent” of 1995, in which the French public decisively and overwhelmingly rejected the future prepared for them by their masters. Massive transport strikes were met, not with the usual public indignation, but with overwhelming popular support. Plans to begin dismantling the welfare state were halted in their tracks and conservatives were booted out of office. A large and growing constituency is now eager for a new, alternative vision for society. But the left, paralyzed by the fear of utopianism, seems unable to provide one.

The matter is urgent, Singer says; if we fail, fascists are waiting in the wings. He ends with a rough but appealing vision of what this “society of equals” might look like: the gradual creation of an economic order based on principles of democratic self-management, as well as an immediate redirection of scientific research to the cause of eliminating unnecessary labor. This would create the conditions for people to lead more free, creative and meaningful lives.

**B**oth authors do end up covering much of the same ground. They are obliged to deal with the usual objections: that the history of the 20th century has shown that utopian dreams inevitably lead to mass murder. But let us consider, Jacoby proposes, the total number of people who have been butchered by politicians in this century. How many fell victim to utopians? Certainly the largest share were murdered by right-wing nationalists of one sort or another. What's more, Singer adds, those leftists who did commit such crimes were the least utopian:

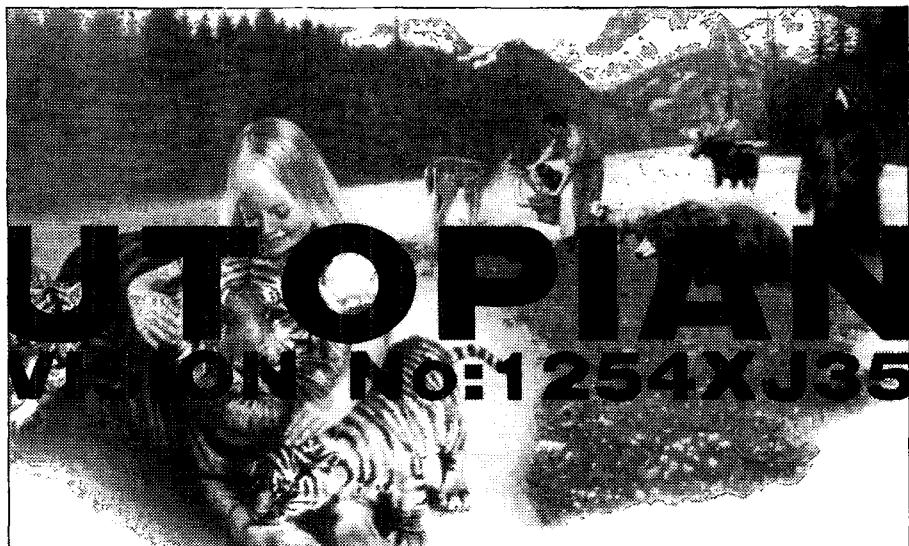
Whatever the crimes of the Soviet leaders, let us repeat, they were not inspired by utopia. Stalin did not dream

of an egalitarian society, of the abolition of the hierarchical division of labor and the withering away of the state. Neither Brezhnev nor Chernenko aspired to spread the self-government of “associated producers” across the planet. The obvious absurdity of such suggestions reveals the crooked purposes behind the slander.

Singer and Jacoby make another, overwhelmingly powerful point. Abandoning radical dreams was supposed to lead to a flourishing of liberalism. In reality, both collapsed. I would add that the moment the left dropped the visionary ball, right-wingers dashed in to snatch it up. The

Gingrich's fall, most have already dropped the pretense. But in countries currently under the tutelage of the IMF—the countries where most people live—the changes inflicted really have been revolutionary, and have done unimaginable damage. “Free market reforms” have impoverished millions, destroyed whole societies, plunged great swathes of the planet into despair and war. What has been done is truly one of the great crimes of human history, but if nothing else, it allows us to gain some kind of perspective. What made these crimes possible? Was it utopianism?

Well, it's hard to deny that there is a utopian element here. Neoliberals do



result has been, for the last 10 years at least, a strangely surreal, rather ridiculous historical moment. As the left sank largely into a politics of reaction, unable to raise their passions except to preserve things that were already there (social welfare policies, the ozone layer, rent control, trees), “conservatives” suddenly started posing as revolutionaries, thumping their Friedmans and Hayeks like so many little red books. The Internet swarmed with unprecedented beings: Republican cyberpunks, anarcho-capitalists, revolutionary Objectivists. For the first time in history, even science fiction was turning predominantly right-wing.

The moment is already passing. Republicans posing as revolutionaries were always a bit absurd; since

have an ideal vision of a truly “free” market, one which has never really existed, and surely never could. It does seem to inspire them. But clearly, neoliberals do not kill because they like to fantasize about free markets. They kill because, like Stalinists, they refuse to admit they are dealing with fantasies—because they mistake their fantasies for inevitable scientific truths.

To expand on Singer's point: What made Stalinists capable of such terrible crimes was not that they dreamed mad dreams—Stalinists were actually notoriously short on imagination—but that they were convinced their version of Marxism gave them a scientific understanding of human history. History could only advance in one direction. They were merely its agents. It was this

utter certainty that made it possible to cast aside all decency and common sense. Millions of Russian peasants could thus be told: Science has proven that this is the only way forward, so shut up and do what you're told, because after all, even if it may mean untold suffering and death for the moment, somewhere down the road (we're not sure quite when) all this will lead to a paradise of freedom and prosperity. Is this not exactly the line being handed these same Russian peasants—indeed just about every peasant in the world—by Clinton and the IMF? Take away the show trials, and Stalinism and neoliberalism become almost indistinguishable: the same faith in a science of society, the same intentional encouragement of starvation, the same obsession with economic growth numbers as ends in themselves.

**T**o understand what's really at stake here, I think it might help to consider how the political spectrum came to be divided between something called "left" and "right" to begin with. The terms themselves go back to seating arrangements in the French Estates General of 1789, but the left's founding ideas trace back to Enlightenment *philosophes* of the previous generation. (The right's ideas mainly rose in reaction to them.) But what was really new about these ideas? Not the notion of revolution: History is full of peasant revolts, egalitarian doctrines, utopian prophets with visions of a just society, and attempts—sometimes, even partly successful—to translate such visions into reality. But previous revolutionaries were never quite so self-conscious. Demands for a just society were presented as either (a) demands for the restoration of some past Golden Age or (b) direct revelations from God.

What the Enlightenment introduced was the idea that it was possible—even more, legitimate—to imagine a better society, and then try to bring it into being, not on the basis of any outside authority, but simply because it would be better. This was no little thing. It was a concept of human freedom—not just individual freedom, either, but collective freedom—unprecedented in history.

Like most ideas of freedom, though, it has proved very difficult to maintain. Part of the problem is that from the very beginning, it came entangled with that other Enlightenment invention, Progress, or the faith that the growth of science and rationality—or class struggle or other endless varieties of alternative Motors of History—were inevitably going to lead us to this better world. The two have been so consistently entangled, in fact, that few have

**Most people know things are stupid and unfair, but they lack a reason to believe in an alternative.**

noticed they are completely contradictory. The first suggests that human beings are capable of making their own history. The second sees us as mere agents of "structural forces" that operate on their own accord—though ones which, purportedly, will hand us our freedom somewhere down the road.

One would think a reasonable response to the collapse of Stalinism would be to go back to work on more compelling visions. But often the reaction was precisely the opposite: Witness all those Marxist economists who seemed to switch almost seamlessly from talking about a capitalism that would inevitably self-destruct to one that will inevitably roll over anything that tries to stand in its way. The one thing they seem utterly unwilling to consider is that the future might just be up to us.

Of course, it's not as if everyone on the left ever really had given up the idea of an unprecedented social order, and then trying to bring it about on the grounds that it would simply be right. Feminism always has been based on doing exactly that. The gay and lesbian movement, even more so. Is it a coincidence these are also by far the most successful social movements of the past 30 years? Perhaps it's just impossible to build an egalitarian social order on the basis of a domestic order—the patriarchal family—that ensures people will experience inequality from the moment they are born. Maybe, or maybe not—but do we know? Before giving up on the future of humanity, we should at least be *fairly* sure.

Singer and Jacoby are right: The last thing we need to be doing is penance for supposed past sins of utopianism. This is the moment for new, grandiose visions, experiments, inspirations and wild fantasies. (Myself, I would vote for a feminist-led revival of anarcho-syndicalism, but maybe that's just me. For now, I'd happily settle for a world in which suggesting this would not seem ridiculous.) Most people already know the existing social order is stupid and unfair. What they lack is some reason to believe there's a viable alternative—or increasingly, among younger people, any idea of what an alternative might even look like. Whose fault is that?

As Singer concludes: "If every attempt to change society, and not just mend it, is branded angrily and contemptuously as utopian, then, turning the insult into a badge of honor, we must proudly proclaim that we are all utopians." ■

*David Graeber is a professor of anthropology at Yale University.*

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# Magic Market

By Bill Boisvert

**H**appy families find and exchange meaning through objects; unhappy families think they are dealing with just things," argues James B. Twitchell in his new book, *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*. Anyone who has lived through an awkward Christmas knows that commodity exchange is not the substance of family happiness, but a poor and painful substitute for it. Yet the formulation is typical of this foolish and bombastic book, a defense of consumerism and the myriad ways in which it supposedly adds meaning to life under capitalism.

Twitchell, an English professor at the University of Florida, is author of *Adcult USA: The Triumph of Advertising in*

## **Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism**

By James B. Twitchell  
Columbia University Press  
310 pages, \$24.95

*American Culture*, a pro-business tract that extolled the "irrepressible vitality of commercial speech." In *Temptation*, he takes up the task of correcting a "drift to the left" in cultural studies led by a vanguard of professors whose agenda is to "deter capitalism" by attacking its most winsome aspects—advertising, fashion, TV, the mall and the multiplex. Twitchell wants us to break free of the ideological straitjacket of "vulgar Marxism" and acknowledge consumerism not as the hideous cultural superstructure of corporate exploitation, but as the authentic expression of popular will.

Twitchell starts with the premise that "we like stuff," a proposition so obvious at first grunt that only a communist would disagree. But in defiance of our common-sense understanding that "not only does consuming make us happy, [it] is what gives our lives order and purpose," academics have foisted on us the conviction that, by making stuff and selling it to us, "big business is picking on us." Consumerism, according to this Big Lie, is not just the stuff we like, but a gigantic conspiracy between manufac-

turers and marketers—a cabal of Snidely Whiplashes twisting "their handlebar mustaches"—who plot to bewitch and bamboozle us into buying mountains of worthless junk destined to lie unplayed-with around the Christmas tree.

As their chorus drowns out the still, small voice within that tells us we *do* like stuff, Twitchell says, the culture commissars embrace the most odious aspects of hierarchs past. They are sexists because they belittle the supposedly feminine sphere of shopping and domesticity. They are puritans, and therefore instigators of an unhealthy psychology of denial: The more they get us to condemn our consumerism, the more they stoke our repressed longing to consume. They are elitists, proclaiming arrogantly, "We are the solution and you who do not agree are the problem. We are saving the world from you, for you." Worst of all, they are square, and they want to make us square too. If they had their way, we would all "read Wordsworth, eat lots of salad, and have meetings to discuss Really Important Issues."

**T**witchell names a number of partisans of this straw man, including Ralph Nader, John Kenneth Galbraith, Vance Packard, the Frankfurt School (inevitably) and, going way back, Thorstein Veblen. These "know-it-alls" and "melancholy Eeyores" are the leaders of the current "drift to the left" in academia, despite that not all of them are in academia, or even alive, or—as in the case of Nader, the man who made the world safe for consumerism—even opposed to consumerism. Twitchell almost never quotes these people and never, *ever* engages their arguments beyond the level of schoolyard taunts, rendered always in an obnoxious tone of falsetto mimicry.

To Twitchell, critics of consumer culture are motivated partly by an adherence to obsolete dogmas and their own self-interest as purveyors of a competing brand of "high culture," but mostly by the fact that mass culture is youth culture, and they, sexless old curmudgeons that they are, find themselves no

longer invited to the rave. Mass culture is paid for by ads, Twitchell reasons, and the purpose of ads is to get consumers to switch brands. But ads are lost on middle-aged professors, who are well past their "prime branding years" and have lapsed into a rigor mortis of "low and simplified consumption," clinging rigidly to their unlabeled tweed jackets and frumpy Volvos. Advertisers pursue the impressionable youth market (a category that fluctuates wildly in Twitchell's haphazard treatment, sometimes consisting of 15- to 30-year-olds, sometimes 12- to 30-year-olds, sometimes yawning to include females ages 18 to 49). That is why TV, radio and magazines all appeal exclusively to the young, who have the requisite time, income and attention deficits to sample all the new brands beamed their way.

Twitchell tries but fails to paper over the cracks in his life-cycle theory of consumption. Fifty-year-old professors have much more purchasing power than their 19-year-old students, and advertisers know it—unless we're to believe that the flood of commercials for Lexuses and mutual funds and diamond anniversary bracelets is aimed at teenagers. Indeed, his paean to the gilded youth of our cultural "brandscape" turns out on closer examination to be a shockingly mean-spirited attack on the very youngsters he claims to champion.

Twitchell castigates the older generation of aging culture critics for their "hostility" toward the young, yet he depicts young people in the most lurid terms as greedy wastrels who squander all their parents' money on the latest designer fashions. No danger of them succumbing to Wordsworth, since they are all "functionally illiterate." He adds in a footnote that this poses problems for market researchers, who must study these prized specimens with camcorders, since "the kids can't fill out questionnaires" and are "hard to interview because of articulation problems." His keenest admiration is reserved for "inner city youths" who express their ardent devotion to brand by gunning each other down over Tommy Hilfiger jackets, and then rapping about it.

This constant resort to absurd, contradictory and intermittently racist clichés is symptomatic of a deep incoherence. Twitchell's book celebrates the vibrant

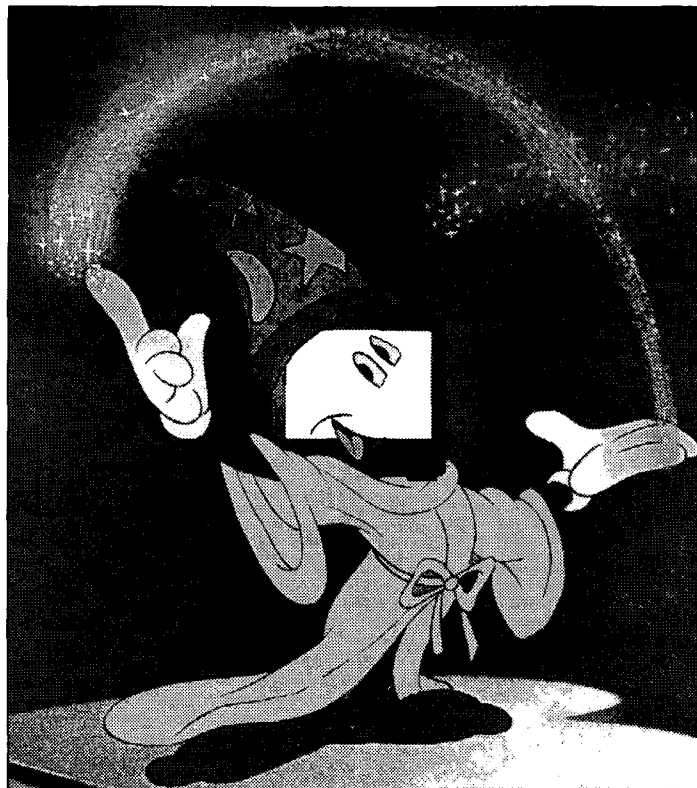
individualism of the consumer market but can imagine actual people only in terms of the most ruthlessly stereotyped market niches. I think this is a result of his too-deep immersion in the literature of marketers, who bemoan their lot as the helpless playthings of sovereign consumer fiat even as they boast of their ability to carve the body consumptive into ever-more precise demographic clusters and determine, in Twitchell's gullible retelling, "not only what you bought last year but what you will consume next week." Twitchell has imbibed both their self-serving "studies" and their outwardly blithe but inwardly cynical and misanthropic worldview.

Inevitably, his strident defense of the flattery and manipulation of marketplace culture collides, however gently, with his lingering impulses toward scholarly detachment. The resulting conflicts make him come across as something of a self-hating intellectual, as he hurls insults at phantom academics who are his demographic doppelgängers and desperately tries to attach himself to a youth culture that, deep down, he really despises.

Ironically, Twitchell's own exposition of the history of consumerism demolishes his thesis and confirms that of the critics he derides. He insists that consumers are never "duped" or "tricked" by marketers against their better judgement, because "commercialism is our better judgement." Yet in a couple of engaging, if derivative, chapters he demonstrates exactly the opposite—that marketers, through such devices as packaging, supermarket layout, pointless brand proliferation and mystical advertising, manage to provoke consumers into over-valuing goods that are, if not shoddy, at least indistinguishable from each other.

This is what people usually mean when they use the words "duped" or "tricked." But critics who use those words, while perhaps technically correct, miss the point, Twitchell argues,

because consumers aren't after the products themselves. They're after the aura, the halo of manipulative signifiers that surround products and make their value as "just things" purely incidental. In our



demystified, profane world, "branding, packaging, fashion and shopping are the central meaning making acts." Consumerism doesn't give us commodities, it gives us a sense of "affiliation, inclusion and magical purpose." The things we buy and the brands we wear swaddle us in the images of the ads that sold them to us; they instantly telegraph social status and personality type to the otherwise oblivious urban crowd; they confer on us "place, prestige, comfort, security and confidence." Through the dove-tailing commercials and product placements we see on TV, we are able to construct lifestyles, "coherent patterns of self-hood," out of the conflicting demands of late capitalism, which needs sober professionals to create surpluses and spendthrift hedonists to absorb them.

**T**his line of argument, although Twitchell won't admit it, is nothing other than the "cultural hegemony" model of the Frankfurt School:

Consumption is no longer for use, but for exchange within the libidinal economy of the advertised dream world. Twitchell doesn't really disagree with the analysis, he just objects to the attitude. Vulgar Marxists had words to describe the process by which we no longer have any identity apart from our purchasing histories, but they are all pejoratives like "exploitation," "alienation" and "fetishism." Twitchell admonishes them to face up to the lesson of 1989, namely that "democracy is the right to buy anything you want" and that the class struggle is over because "almost everyone can have almost everything" as long as they "finish high school, get a job" and don't take drugs. (Although, "to be sure, we can't all have the same brands.")

Twitchell claims that far from degrading our lives and hollowing out our minds, nothing could be less alienating and inauthentic than consumer culture, which emancipates our creative capacities like nothing before. He illustrates this claim, pathetically, with an account of his own televisual habits:

Unlike reading, which really is passive, watching television is almost frantic with creative activity. ... I am not a passive viewer. I use the remote to pass through various programs. ... The ones I like most have to do with scenes of sex and violence. Car chases and décolletage stop me in my tracks. I even use the picture-within-a-picture device so I can have my nesting show on most of the screen while prospecting for these images of interest.

This is a true flow experience for Twitchell, full of "repetition and slight variation," although he sometimes has to leave the room when his wife or daughters seize hold of the remote, because "the image salads they toss" leave him "antsy."

But Twitchell contends that consumerism has done even more than usher us into the classless society of high



school graduates. It gives us something akin to a Trinitarian apotheosis: "Reason and passion unite in the metaphysic of the Brand." Unfortunately, he actually means something by that phrase, basically that we are to take consumerism as a modern-day replacement for religious faith. Twitchell expounds his unoriginal analogy between consumerism and religion (especially an institution he stupidly misnames "the Holy Roman Catholic Church") at unbearable length—denominations are like brands competing for market share, religious iconography is like advertising, tales of martyrs are celebrity endorsements, etc. His sophomoric point is that the lies and fatuities of advertising are really just a kind of "magical thinking" similar to the litanies of our most ancient creeds. We shouldn't condemn the glib falsehoods of consumer culture simply because they are glib and false, because the same kind of "magical thinking" underlies every other "organizing system"—not just religion but art, politics, law, even science, "now the vastest repository of magical thinking." When we laugh at the supernatural whirlwind properties ascribed to kitchen cleansers, we should remember that "two hundred years ago" our ancestors believed that "the Heavenly Host organized the world" and "had categories like seraphim, cherubim, archangels and even entire casts of ordinary angels to prove it."

**W**ait a minute. Is Twitchell really saying that in 1799—a year when Newton's vision of a clockwork universe held firm sway, a year when the Enlightenment marched under arms, a year that saw the whole world convulsed by revolutionary ideologies of secular salvation—everyone believed the world was run by angels? Readers may chide me for harping on this one slovenly anachronism when there are so many others to choose from. But the lapse is telling, because it shows that to Twitchell there is *nothing* in between a medieval mindscape of occult powers and holy relics and the postmodern age of advertised commodity fetishism. The Enlightenment, the French Revolution, socialism—none of these historical developments merit mention as harbingers of a secular

worldview that might possibly have enlisted people's energies and imaginations without resorting to superstition and obscurantism. No, for Twitchell, any way of constructing reality beyond a crude fairy-tale totemism is literally unthinkable. Once we stopped believing in angels, we all simply slumped over in "melancholy" and "angst" until ad agencies finally took up the burden of re-enchanting the world for us.

**We may no longer  
have identities apart  
from our purchasing  
histories, but to  
Twitchell, that's good.**

"Magical thinking" is the belief that talismans can instantly transmute desire into reality. That is indeed the hallmark of consumer culture, where deodorants and long-distance plans instantly confer sexual bliss and family togetherness on their possessors. But is every belief system a case of magical thinking, as Twitchell claims? Is science? By elaborating the impersonal, mechanistic processes that underlie reality, science emphasizes the world's indifference to human desire. What about politics, that tedious forum for Really Important Issues? Liberal politics is a process of torturous deliberations ending only in muddled compromise, and revolutionary politics arrives at its utopias only after arduous or bloody struggle. Nothing very magi-

cal there. What about art and literature? If it's the kind of art and literature that bores Twitchell, it's probably about conflicting, thwarted desires. Even religion, conceived by Twitchell as a welter of priestly mumbo-jumbo, has less magic than meets the eye; its imagined paradises are always predicated on rather unforgiving precepts of earthly social life that demand we suppress our own desires—sometimes to the point of martyrdom—in recognition of the moral worth of others.

This is a terrible book, as repetitive and slightly varied as an evening in the Twitchell family room. Its appearance marks a big step backward for the publishing industry. Yet Twitchell's conceit of "magical thinking" inadvertently serves a purpose by clarifying some of the real dangers posed by a triumphalist consumer culture. Magic demands nothing of us, offers no scope for human agency and, in the end, doesn't work. The corollary of consumerism's magical thinking is therefore a stance of passivity and defeatism toward a social order that thrives on conjuring up desires it has no intention of fulfilling. Art, science, religion, politics—all provide independent vantage points from which we can think honestly about both the limitations and the possibilities of human life. Once they are all subsumed under the imperatives of the market we lose our capacity to do this. ■

Bill Boisvert wrote about the investment bank Goldman Sachs in the *Spring Books* issue (May 2).

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# Nowhere USA

By Christopher Becker

It has been argued that the main feature distinguishing humans from other species is not higher intelligence or speech, but our marked ability to alter our environment. We have created our own structures for living and working, constantly pushing outward while leaving behind a confused clash of old and new. Where once we had farmland and town centers, now stand housing tracts and strip malls. In place of multi-family brownstones designed by architects are prefab housing units designed by investment firms.

As Bettina Drew winds her way through American urban life in her book *Crossing the Expendable Landscape*, she shows us the effect these changes are hav-

## Crossing the Expendable Landscape

By Bettina Drew  
Graywolf Press  
221 pages, \$15

ing on our national psyche. In the seven cities that she explores, Drew traces the path of each one's modern development

for a telling portrayal of precalculated and subsidized sprawl. At each of her stops (among them Dallas, Las Vegas, Simi Valley, Calif. and Branson, Mo.) she talks with residents and city planners, as well as offering her own incomparable insight.

At the heart of her writing is the question of what happens when the rich bypass public space altogether, completing their abandonment of central cities on a massive scale. What will become of a society oriented away from public works, libraries, mass transit and government services, when the only community space is in a mall food court between two superstores? For a fair idea, Drew reminds us of the fate of Boston's West End. When it fell to the wrecking ball under the guise of urban renewal, it shattered the lives of its residents who were forced to move elsewhere. They reported their feelings in simple but moving terms: "I felt as though I had lost everything"; "I lost all the friends I knew"; "I always felt I had to go home to the West End and even now I feel like crying when I pass by."

One of the most unsettling places that Drew visits is the artificially planned city of Celebration, Fla. Potential homeowners are enticed by mythical images of wholesome living: tree-lined streets, inviting houses with front porches, old-fashioned street lamps and accessible parks. But beneath the calm surface and familiarity is the knowledge that one company—Disney—owns most of the infrastructure. The parks, sidewalks, roads and water system, not to mention the town hall almost void of function, are all part of a massive corporation. While the public school system is operated by Osceola County, it is managed with input from Disney and its "on-site professional development center for teachers."

While the issue of land use and ownership rights can be highly politicized, Drew never loses sight of the fact that people are at the heart of the matter—where they live, work and play. Instead of barraging the reader with statistics and facts, her writing is an immersion into the local life she writes about. She understands that the increasing disposability and conglomeration of our living space cuts deeper than the loss of architectural history. It represents a loss of our future sustainability and a massive unraveling of our way of life. ■



*Masters of Hypocrisy*, 1999, by Dragomir Djekic. Djekic, a Serb living in America, is joined by other artists of Serbian descent in *Target: Peace* at Pi Gallery in Chicago. The exhibit runs through July 3.



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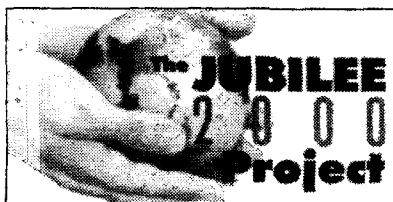
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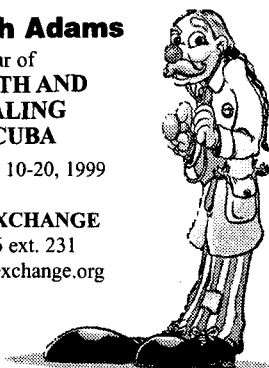




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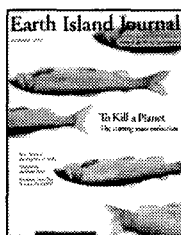
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# The DEMAND *for* LIFEBOATS

By Peter Bernstein

In April 1912, the Titanic struck an iceberg and sank in the North Atlantic. Since then, the Titanic has inspired at least five movies, endless books and even a musical. But there has been little economic analysis of the panic that ensued as the ship sank. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to dispel the myth that there was a shortage of lifeboats on the Titanic. True, there were 2,300 passengers and room for only 800 in the lifeboats. But to call this a shortage is to reveal a gross misunderstanding of the principles of economics.

Sure, everyone wants a seat on a lifeboat, just like everyone wants a BMW. But the number of BMWs produced is far less than the number of people who want one. Consequently, the price of a BMW increases until demand equals supply. So it should have been on the Titanic. Instead of all that panic, the efficient solution would have been to allow the price of a seat on a lifeboat to rise to the level sufficient to cause demand to equal supply.

Now, some may wonder, is that fair? Is it fair that some people should drown because they cannot afford—or choose not to afford—to buy a seat on a lifeboat? Fairness is a very tricky issue. I mean, some people in America are so poor they don't even have to pay income tax. Is that fair?

The point is that the market doesn't care about fairness—the market cares about allocating lifeboats in an economically efficient manner. And it is clearly economically efficient to

allow richer, more productive people to survive, while low-skill, low-income people are sent to a horrifying watery grave.

What about wealthy retirees? Is it economically efficient to allow the idle non-productive rich to survive? Yes. Allowing the rich to survive, even if they are not currently productive, is efficient because it creates incentives to be rich. Many people may ask, why should I be rich? Why not stay poor and avoid the burden of paying income tax? The answer is: You should become rich because if you're ever on a boat and it starts to sink, you'll be in a much better position to buy a seat on a lifeboat.

Now we've all heard the story about millionaire John Jacob Astor, how he gave up his seat on a lifeboat and went down with the Titanic. That's the story, but how do we know that Astor didn't sell his seat, thinking that the Titanic wasn't really sinking but merely undergoing a technical correction to a lower place in the water?

A practical question: Does it make sense to wait until the ship hits an iceberg before you start selling seats on a lifeboat? That all depends on the profit-maximizing strategy of your average lifeboat salesman. On the one hand, once a ship starts to sink, the lifeboat salesman is in a great position to make profits. But if the ship doesn't sink, he's screwed. I mean, what if the Titanic had made it across the Atlantic without hitting an iceberg? We'd probably all be thinking, "Lifeboats for 800 on an unsinkable ship? What an incredible waste of money." ■